



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





Nos. 3 & 4.

0 3 6 2

# CHINA COAST TALES

BY

LISE BOEHM.

*. . . . un volume que les sottises humaines m'ont aisément fou*

LE DIABLE BOI



SHANGHAI--HONGKONG--YOKOHAMA--SINGAPORE :  
KELLY AND WALSH, LIMITED.

1897

,

3 & 4.

Giles, E. W. (Edersheim).

# CHINA COAST TALES

BY

LISE BOEHM.

STANFORD LIBRARY

*... un volume que les sottises humaines m'ont aisément fourni.*

LE DIABLE BOITEUX.



SHANGHAI-HONGKONG-YOKOHAMA-SINGAPORE :  
KELLY AND WALSH, LIMITED.

1897



*Herbert Clark Hoover.*



BY THE SAME AUTHOR :

VOL. I. { No. 1.—*Dobson's Daughter.*  
          { No. 2.—*Of the Noble Army.*

1. 3 & 4.

Giles, E. W. (Edersheim).

# CHINA COAST TALES

BY

LISE BOEHM.

STANFORD LIBRARY

*... un volume que les sottises humaines m'ont aisément fourni.*

LE DIABLE BOITEUX.



SHANGHAI-HONGKONG-YOKOHAMA-SINGAPORE :  
KELLY AND WALSH, LIMITED.

1897



*Herbert Clark Hoover.*

BY THE SAME AUTHOR:

VOL. I. { No. 1.—*Dobson's Daughter.*  
No. 2.—*Of the Noble Army.*

3 & 4.

Giles, Z. W. (Edersheim).

# CHINA COAST TALES

BY

LISE BOEHM.

STANFORD LIBRARY

*... un volume que les sottises humaines m'ont aisément fourni.*

LE DIABLE BOITEUX.



SHANGHAI-HONGKONG-YOKOHAMA-SINGAPORE :  
KELLY AND WALSH, LIMITED.

1897

PR4715  
G52Cs  
v. 2-3.

180862

Y8A98U1 0807M4T2

No. 3.

# *IN THE SIXTIES*

*A CHINA COAST TALE*

BY

LISE BOEHM.

*Had we never loved so kindly,  
Had we never loved so blindly,  
Never met, or never parted,  
We had ne'er been broken-hearted !*





# *IN THE SIXTIES:*

---

## PART I.

---

### CHAPTER I.

LONG, long ago, in the good old days, before France began to think of Tongking, before Germany began to think of ousting England in the Far East, before Russia dreamt of a Pacific ice-free port; half-way and more through the Sixties, when dollars were worth the getting and bimetallism a fancy topic of conversation; when fortunes could be made in a decade, if at the peril of one's life,—some thirty years ago, in short, a grand cleaning, scrubbing and dusting had been going on for a fortnight in the house of the Commissioner of Imperial Maritime Customs, Amoy, South China.

Now the Commissioner was a man who usually left his servants to do just as much, or as little, as they chose to do. His was precisely the establishment a Chinaman delights in, where there is no troublesome "missisy" to demand monthly, weekly, or even daily accounts, to compare expenses with some experienced friend, and to generally make herself obnoxious. Provided his meals were served punctually, Mr. Watkins was fairly indifferent as to what he was made to swallow. Provided his own particular armchair held together, he did not care if the rest of his furniture was allowed to crumble away through neglect or white ants. Such was the normal state of Mr. Watkins and of Mr. Watkins' household for eleven months in every year.

But when the twelfth month, marked in the calendar as May, came round, the aspect of the great dreary house on the top of the hill changed. Every available coolie, both in Mr. Watkins' house and in his office, every Customs boatman, every watchman, every odd man, was pressed into the work of cleaning. The odour of carbolic fluids, of patent soaps and insect-destroying powders pervaded the whole compound, and made the house smell like the disinfecting ward of a hospital. Scrubbing cloths and dusting brushes, sufficient to last an ordinary Chinese household for a generation, were recklessly given out. Mosquito-nets were repaired, centipedes and lizards were terrified from their resting-places, boxes of stores arrived from Hongkong, the official servants received fresh uniforms, and Mr. Watkins himself spent a whole day picking out white trousers, and coats which were neither frayed at the cuffs, nor shaky about the buttonholes, nor badly ironmoulded. For Mrs. Ratcliff was expected for her yearly visit.

Everybody in China knew Mrs. Ratcliff, or at any rate knew all about her. Her husband, Mr. Ratcliff, was head of one of the largest *hongs* in Shanghai, a good solid fellow, not brilliant in a drawing-room, but excellent in his own place—the office. Mrs. Ratcliff, who had made her first appearance in the East as something between a nursery-governess and a lady's maid, had married him solely on account of his money and position. There was indeed nothing attractive about Mr. Ratcliff besides these. Had his wife followed her own inclinations she would undoubtedly have married her first love, David Watkins, who was then a young fellow with plenty of brains and plenty of looks, but with nothing standing to his account at the Bank. There had been no hesitation possible in Mrs. Ratcliff's case. She married the rich man, of course, but, amazing to say, the poor man did not object. On the contrary, the Ratcliff marriage seemed to bring them closer together,—perhaps because the lady now occupied an exalted position—which is usually

found to attract all eyes and all criticism,—and from that date onwards their names were always coupled together; in early days, as lovers and as the subjects of ill-natured gossip and scandal; in later years, when Mr. Watkins had become a Commissioner of Customs with a solid income, as types of China Coast “friends.” More than this, they actually became models on which later arrivals were wont to form themselves. Other wives’ husbands had no business to object to *tertium quids*—Mr. Ratcliff didn’t object. A man and a woman could be friends, Platonically, for ever and a day, and no whisper go forth of the Divorce Court—witness Mrs. Ratcliff and Mr. Watkins. And no sensible husband could possibly object to his wife’s paying long visits to her particular “friend”—because Mr. Ratcliff made no objection to Mrs. Ratcliff’s yearly visit to Mr. Watkins.

How many households along the China coast came nigh or altogether to shipwreck by striving to imitate the Ratcliff-Watkins friendship, it is not here the place to record. Perhaps the shipwrecks would have come anyhow, even if Mrs. Ratcliff had been married to a different husband.

But however much opinion might be divided as regarded the propriety of Mrs. Ratcliff’s conduct from the *wife’s* point of view, there were no two minds as to its inexpediency, not to say wrongfulness, from the *mother’s* standpoint, now that her only daughter, Violet, had come out to China from school.

For Mrs. Ratcliff had a daughter, and a very pretty daughter too. Pretty with the prettiness of youth, and rosy cheeks, and laughing eyes; with the prettiness alas! which belongs to youth alone, and which freckles, or turns yellow and leathery, or red and coarse, even before the fatal age of thirty. Not a beauty such as her mother had been, and still was,—with regular features, a tall and graceful figure, a skin that refused to wrinkle, and a face that looked only more youthful when

crowned with matronly bonnets. Mrs. Ratcliff had no need of hair-dyes or cosmetics; she possessed the secret of eternal youth. But she also possessed its disadvantages—its giddinesses, its want of mental and moral equilibrium, its hardness, and the like. Violet's mother was certainly not a safe guide; rather, she was decidedly a bad example for a girl of eighteen just out of the schoolroom.

Witness what she did on the present occasion. Only one month after Violet's arrival in Shanghai, she took her daughter with her down to Amoy to stay with Mr. Watkins.

Mrs. Ratcliff's female acquaintances in Shanghai (she had no friends but men) were aghast at this proceeding. Had Violet been left behind with her father, they would probably have been equally aghast. But as remonstrances would have been wasted on the erring Mrs. Ratcliff, they reserved their opinions for select tea-parties, and confined themselves in general society to hoping "dear Violet" would be none the worse (morally) for the trip.

But the two went down to Amoy, and were received with open arms and a great flourish of entertainments by the Amoy people. Not that they (at least, the ladies) approved of Mrs. Ratcliff a whit more than did their Shanghai sisters, but she was the Commissioner's guest, and brought with her the latest fashions, and was quite willing that her dresses should be copied, and was so generally amiable that it was impossible not to shew her the best China coast hospitality. So, just as in former years, Mrs. Ratcliff and Mr. Watkins went out for walks, and rides, and sails by themselves, giving the scandal-mongers round the Club-bar food for tongue-wagging during the next half-year. As for Violet, Mrs. Ratcliff gave her full liberty to amuse herself just as she chose. For this was holiday-time, and even mothers are not expected to look after their daughters on such occasions.

Now in those days the Amoy community consisted of but few ladies, all, with one exception, missionaries, and of a good many bachelors. These last, mostly clerks in tea houses, were accustomed to spend their lives mainly in pyjamas, and were warranted to consume unknown quantities of whisky and soda without any visible detriment to their health. The Consulate staff were bachelors; so were nearly all the Customs officials. The only lady "in the swing" was the Deputy-Commissioner's wife, abhorred by Mr. Watkins as a "giggling goose," and not to be trusted to take charge of any girl. It was very awkward indeed that Mrs. Ratcliff had brought down Violet! For the Commissioner realised, what Mrs. Ratcliff certainly had not, that Violet ought to be provided with an escort. So, the day after his guests had arrived, Mr. Watkins summoned his most trustworthy Assistant into his private office, and solemnly made Violet over to him.

"I know I can trust you, Kennedy," he said anxiously. "Nominally Miss Ratcliff will be under Mrs. Denman's charge,—that is, if Mrs. Ratcliff herself is not able to go everywhere with her daughter. But a lady isn't always quite enough, and—in short, Kennedy, I have the greatest confidence in you!"

"Certainly, sir," Wilfrid Kennedy had answered. And Mr. Watkins had gone across to his own house, and had told Mrs. Ratcliff she need not trouble about Violet. For he had given her as special charge to the only dangerous young man in Amoy, and had thus made it impossible for him to fall in love with her.

Mr. Watkins had a fine contempt for women, Mrs. Ratcliff of course excepted. He did not consider them capable of genuinely falling in love, and explained away their desire to get married as simply arising from the feminine notion that being married advanced women in the social scale. Love and marriage had nothing to do with each other, he said; and all his personal

experience had but tended to confirm Mr. Watkins in his theories. Further, to the Commissioner "girls" were uninteresting, and Violet was a girl. He certainly never for one moment dreamt that she could fall in love with Kennedy of her own initiative.

Moreover, Wilfrid Kennedy was scarcely, in the Commissioner's opinion, a marrying man. He was about twenty-six, fair, and distinctly youthful in appearance. His companions reckoned him a good-hearted fellow, and he was a decided favourite with the older men and the ladies. I do not fancy he was overburdened with brains; but he was a thorough gentleman, in his instincts as well as in his behaviour. Wilfrid was, indeed, the "useful man" of the community. As regarded his personal history, he had come out to China on a nomination in the Customs service at the age of nineteen, and had just now completed his first seven years of service.

As everyone in China knows, at the end of his first seven years of service a Customs Assistant may apply for two years' leave on half-pay, which period he may spend anywhere—usually "at home," *viz.* Europe—his return passage to China being paid for him. But of those Assistants who may take their leave, under such favourable conditions, there are a great many who do not find themselves in a position to do so, and this in spite of having received regular and excellent pay during their period of service. At the end of his first seven years in China a man has often saved nothing, his brain having been turned by the mere possession of money, seemingly inexhaustible to one who has perhaps been brought up in narrow circumstances. Or, he has been bitten rabidly by what is known as "Sinology," and lives, speaks, thinks, and dreams of nothing but the Chinese language and literature. Or, he has been drawn into the ring of speculators, and has risked, even if he has not lost, all his savings in strange and wonderful mines and companies. Or, he is drinking himself into an untimely grave. And as it is

far easier to live on nothing at all, and to die leaving your family to your friends, or to be a Chinese student, or to be a speculator, or to be a hard drinker, in the East than in the West, the man of seven years generally stays out fourteen.

And this was just what Wilfrid Kennedy, though he belonged to none of the last three classes, would have done, had he been able.

Life in the Far East had set its mark on him, a mark which even he himself could perceive. When he first came out to China he was, as behoved the son of a country parson, a good, religious young man,—good, perhaps, because he had never been tested. He had boldly, not to say aggressively, produced his Bible at night amongst his cabin-mates, and had steadily read the portion appointed by the Union to which he belonged—till he dropped out of the way of doing so, when his books of devotion were left behind in the transfer at Galle. As for Church attendance,—there had been no Church in the first port to which he had been sent, and by the time he was transferred to a more privileged place he had adopted the fashionable attitude of contempt towards the missionary body. His total abstinence pledge was of course foredoomed ; six days in an ordinary Junior Assistants' mess had finished that matter. And yet no one called Wilfrid Kennedy a fast young man, nor a regular “soaker” ; though it must be admitted that, in common with those around him, he often, still oftener as the years went by, took rather more to drink than was good for him. All that really happened to him was that, being a weak young fellow, and infinitely afraid of being laughed at, he accommodated himself to his surroundings, which surroundings were altogether different from those of a country parsonage in England.

But now, when he was obliged to go home, for reasons shortly to be stated, Wilfrid Kennedy had been—well, not appalled, because he had had every reason to suspect such would



be the case, but—very disagreeably disgusted to find that his balance at his banker's was simply *nil*. Not a red cent had he saved; and yet there was absolutely nothing to show for all the salary he had so regularly received and spent. It was astonishing how ten dollars here, five dollars there, a few boxes of curios sent home from time to time, often by request for those gigantic swindles, bazaars for charitable objects,—how all such trifling sums had mounted up. Could it be that ten dollars a month, a very moderate sum, spent on that legalised gamble, the Manila Lottery, had cost him over £160 in these seven years? Ten dollars, with the dollar at four and twopence, the very smallest amount he could have set aside! The more Wilfrid Kennedy looked at his bank book, the more he plunged into the hopeless chaos of his unpaid bills, with their inscrutable and not-to-be checked headings of “to account rendered,” the more had he realised that, if money was to be made in the Far East, he at any rate was not the man to make it.

And so, just before the Ratcliffs appeared in Amoy, Wilfrid Kennedy had determined to turn over a new leaf, and to save hard for the last three months of his period of service. Accordingly, he had stormed at his astonished “boy” when that individual produced an account for a fresh stock of whisky for the benefit of Wilfrid's visitors. The whisky was kept in case of sudden illness, but the boy was ordered to say “no got” should any passer-by call in for a long drink. And, in case he should fall into his old easy-going ways through idleness, Kennedy commanded his teacher to be in readiness for four hours' study of Chinese every day, Sundays included. And when the Hongkong tailor came round, Wilfrid Kennedy actually refused to buy an absolutely necessary afternoon coat, announcing his intention of appearing in London “just as he was,” to the unutterable disgust of the “Poole” of the coast. He even, for the space of one whole half-hour, seriously contemplated taking his name off the Club books. But alas for

good intentions! The Ratcliffs came; Mr. Watkins interviewed him; and away went economy with the Chinese dictionary and the teacher, until a more convenient season should arrive. The Commissioner made no mistake when he put Violet Ratcliff into Wilfrid Kennedy's hands. Wilfrid did not, to his own knowledge at least, fall in love with Miss Ratcliff. But Miss Ratcliff fell in love with him. Which, had it been known abroad, would undoubtedly have been characterised as shocking, most unmaidenly, though only to be expected from the daughter of such a mother. But then it wasn't known, at least officially known, though of course all Amoy had declared it must be a match, and a devilish good one for Kennedy. What else could be expected, when the two were together, morning, noon, and night? True, there was the worldly mother to reckon with; but at any rate nobody else in Amoy had a chance. In vain the German Baron, with no estates but infinite pretensions, had twirled his long moustache, and murmured compliments in unintelligible English. In vain the poet of the community had composed a masterpiece in her honour, wherein "Violet" rhymed to "my pilot," and had recited the same with great effect to a chosen few. In vain the *taipan* of the largest hong, a stoutish man of means, with a well filled stable and excellent table, had brought forth after dinner his album, crammed with photographs of adoring fair ones, and had besought Violet to place her portrait as frontispiece to the volume. Violet had just given away her only remaining photograph, and that without consulting even Mrs. Denman, to fill a certain frame on Wilfrid Kennedy's mantelpiece.

Surely he would have been superhuman had he been able to resist at least flirting with a girl who so openly showed her liking for him, and who was, moreover, the only girl he had seen for months! At any rate, the Amoy community never doubted but that Wilfrid made the most of his opportunities. At picnics

Violet and he paired off quite naturally, just after the fashion of their elders and guardians, and a third quickly found himself *de trop*; for the two seemed to have an immense deal to say to each other. Now what can young men and maidens talk about, but the Soul, and Life (with capitals be it noted), or Heart-union and Affinities, which talk the common herd calls love-making? So, at any rate, Mrs. Denman thought, and so she told the horrified Commissioner at the crowning dinner-party of the season. And in this she was only the mouthpiece of the Community, which knew nothing about the photograph.

Still, they were all wrong, and Mr. Watkins alone was right.

For, after the two had broken the ice, and through some little trivial, to-other-eyes-unnoticed accident had become friends rather than acquaintances, Violet Ratcliff suddenly found that she had been put in a sacred place in Kennedy's imagination, and that he was regarding her in a light that was certainly false, but which could not fail to be enormously flattering to her personal vanity. So flattering indeed, that she could not help doing her share in keeping up the delusion. This pleasant, amiable, but decidedly commonplace schoolgirl discovered, on the last evening of her stay in Amoy, that to Wilfrid Kennedy she was no ordinary girl of flesh and blood, but an abstraction, a saint, a wonderful phoenix, an ideal woman. A woman he imagined her without any of the faults, or selfish feelings, or jealous sensibilities of her sex, and yet at the same time a woman in whom to confide, a woman to sympathise, to soothe, and to advise; and all this unflecked by any intrusion of self! In brief, Wilfrid Kennedy set up Violet Ratcliff on a pedestal, and then fell down before her and worshipped her; utterly oblivious of the fact that she was a creature of like passions with himself.

And so he told her, to Violet who knew nothing of this evil world, all the story of how he had wasted his life. He

confessed to her how he had slipped away from what she (his ideal Violet) must approve of; and he asked her advice as to the best manner of pulling himself together again. All this he told her on a bright moonlight night, at a picnic on a little island in the outer harbour of Amoy, when plenty of champagne had oiled the rusty key of his conscience, and the unusual sensation of having a sympathetic listener had turned his head, as he was to realise all too painfully by and by.

And Violet gave her crude advice, and felt flattered at being consulted, and for the time actually imagined herself the ideal woman Wilfrid thought she was, and therefore forgot to play with her eyes, or to shrug her shoulders, or to make smart repartees, or to invite compliments by turning the conversation back to herself. No one had ever known, no one was ever to know, or to dream of, the Violet Ratcliff with whom Wilfrid Kennedy talked that evening. Some skilled in palmistry tell us there are certain lines on the hand which shew what a person was meant to be, by Nature. Alas! what Nature meant is often only too clearly recognisable, by the difference between these "birth" lines on the one hand and those corresponding on the other hand, marking how a disposition, or a destiny, has been warped, or forced aside by circumstances! But Wilfrid Kennedy saw only, so to speak, Violet's "birth" lines that evening—knew her only as she might have been.

And yet he had told her a hard thing, what he had never confided even to his dearest China friend, not even to that poor young fellow who had gone out of his mind and shot himself, for love of the cruel stony blue eyes of the only lady in an out-of-the-way port. Wilfrid had told Violet why he must go home, and for whom; he had told her all his love-story; how it had gradually grown into his life, and how he now feared, with a dread born even with his speaking, that he himself had grown out of fitness for and harmony with it.

"We have always known her," he said. "She was at school with my elder sisters, and in the holidays she often came to stay with us. She was awfully good to me when I was quite a little chap, far kinder than my own sisters. I used to tell her everything, and she would give me advice, and she used to make me promise to go to Church, and the like. She used to give me religious books too, such books as nice-minded girls in England keep on their shelves—little books bound in leather, with red edges and ribbon markers. That went on for years and years, right up to the time when I came out to China. How good she was to me! Even *you* couldn't have been kinder!"

Wilfrid Kennedy was pulling himself up instinctively, giving Violet the chance of changing the subject. But Violet didn't take it. She was leaning back in a cane chair Wilfrid had brought her, looking over her fan at the far away lights of the foreign settlement on the island of Kulangsu. The moonlight just touched with its weird chillness the tips of her fingers and the edge of the skirt of her dress. Near by, the German Baron was leading a stirring chorus in a drinking-song. And just below, close to the water's edge, Mr. Watkins and Mrs. Ratcliff were pacing up and down, living over again old days, and speaking those last words for which there would be no time on the morrow.

"And when I was to come out to China," Wilfrid went on, unconsciously lowering his voice, "though she was far too good for me, though she was rich and I was poor, she allowed me to become engaged to her. Even now, though I am so much older, and have seen so much of the world, I cannot understand how she ever came to care for me, in the marrying way, I mean. Why, she was almost grown up when I remember her first, and I was scarcely out of the nursery! But she has told me since, and indeed I believe it, that she liked me from the very beginning in quite a peculiar way, and that she has never cared for any

other man. And she has never missed a single mail in writing to me. I wish I could say as much! All her people were terribly against our engagement at first—of course they thought me too young—but she writes me that they are quite willing now. But, she was always far too good for me!”

There was a tone of veritable contrition and self-abasement in Wilfrid Kennedy's voice that gave Violet a sudden uneasy sensation. Some difficult point was going to be raised soon; some question she would not be able to answer; something was going to be submitted to her judgment concerning which she would not be able to answer impersonally. But she had neither the courage nor the wit to keep off the impending danger. She simply kept silence.

“I'm not tiring you, am I, Miss Ratcliff?” Wilfrid asked suddenly. “These things can't really have any interest for you. I'm very sorry I have troubled you, I really am!”

“Go on, please,” Violet answered. “Don't you know I *must* take an interest in anything that concerns you, and especially—”

Was this indeed the worldly Mrs. Ratcliff's daughter that was speaking? Surely some of her mother's old charm must have descended to her; that charm which had held clear-headed unsentimental Mr. Watkins a captive slave these twenty years. Wilfrid Kennedy did go on.

“I would awfully like you to give me your opinion on one point, on a point that shall decide all my life for me,” he said, turning away his head so completely that Violet had to strain her ears to catch his words. “Knowing what you do know, what I have told you of my life, what an utter and arrant humbug I shall have to be if I go home now and join in *her* life, and marry her—for she is thoroughly and deeply religious, and lives in a religious set,—now, do you think I ought to go? Wouldn't it be the right and straightforward thing for me to write to her, and tell her

plainly exactly where I am, and where I intend to stay, as regards religion, and so give her the chance of breaking off her engagement, and of giving me up altogether?"

"And what would you do when you got home then?" asked Violet. "How would you meet her?"

"I shouldn't go home. I should have nothing to go home for. I should stay out here, as other men do, and try to follow your advice, and make my life better. A bachelor in China is not necessarily a miserable man!"

Wilfrid was looking towards Mr. Watkins now, to Mr. Watkins who was actually laughing a real, genuine laugh, such as only Mrs. Ratcliff could draw out of him.

"He is very happy," Violet answered, following Kennedy's eyes. "But it is only for two weeks in the year, just the two weeks *she* is here."

A strange thing for a daughter to say; but it did not seem strange to either of them. Kennedy was thinking of his own troubles alone, and vaguely wondering why they now seemed to have sprung up from molehills into mountains. And Violet was thinking—was it only of this stranger woman far away in England, and of the heartache that was threatening her?

"I am so afraid that she will be disappointed in me; in my looks too, as well as in my mind. Don't you think a man changes, and ages, dreadfully in seven years?"

Wilfrid spoke anxiously, as a man speaks who is searching hard to find some, any door of escape from a position he all at once feels to be intolerable.

"You, at your age, cannot have changed nearly so much as you will find she has changed, at hers."

This, which Violet felt to be a brutal truth, very nearly slipped out of her mouth. But she swallowed it down, with a gulp of

shame at her petty spitefulness, and answered, in what was a distinctly unnatural voice :

"If she really loves you, she will not care about your looks. Women don't; I know they don't. Don't fret yourself any more as to what will happen to you. Go home and marry her, and everything will come right."

"Is that what you tell me, Miss Ratcliff? I'll do whatever you say."

And he turned and looked her full in the face.

Luckily for Violet, the moon had just gone behind a cloud. For though she could control her voice, she might not have been able to command her face. And Wilfrid might have seen mirth in it, at the ridiculousness of consulting *her*; or peevishness, at the turn their conversation had taken away from that most interesting of subjects, her own person; or perchance a shadow of sorrow—that sorrow which is too often the fate of a girl whose elders and wisers have not taught her to keep guard over her own heart, lest some passing stranger wound it fatally. The cloud over the moon may have been responsible for many evil hours in two lives.

"Yes, I say go, and I'm sure you won't repent it!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Then, through the darkness, came to them sonorously from the German Baron's chest, with a strong reinforcement from his companions in the chorus, with stampings, and shoutings, and clinking of glasses, the time-immemorial Amoy "birthday" drinking song :—

Und wer im Januar geboren ist,  
Steh auf! steh auf! steh auf!  
Der nehm' sein Gläschen in die Hand,  
Und trink'es aus bis auf den Grund,  
Trink' aus! trink' aus! trink' aus!



Here followed a pause, during which the man whose birthday came in January emptied his glass. Then the chorus burst out:—

Hat's gut gemacht! hat's gut gemacht!  
D'rums wird Er auch nicht ausgelacht! \*

"Ah, I must join in that!" Violet cried. "My birthday is in February; my turn next! Come along, Mr. Kennedy, I can't resist that chorus!"

"Time to be going home, and ending all choruses," chimed in Mr. Watkins from down below. Your mother is tired, Violet, and this is the last night you will have in a level bed for some days to come. You will have rough weather for your trip up to Shanghai; it's going to blow hard to-morrow!"

"That will make you stay, perhaps," Kennedy whispered.

But Violet only answered:

"I hope not. I've made up my mind to go, and I don't want to stay in Amoy any longer!"

Which was an unkind and ungracious thing to say, but one which served Wilfrid Kennedy quite right.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Very strange Mr. Kennedy didn't come to see you off!" Mrs. Ratcliff said to her daughter as the steamer slipped gently round Kulangsu Island next day, and the various picnic spots passed them by. The mother and the daughter had the deck all to themselves, and Mrs. Ratcliff was actually talking to Violet for the first time since many days. It was a very short-lived chance of talking now; for beyond the outer harbour of Amoy they were to expect "dirty weather," which Mrs. Ratcliff never attempted to face. She would not wait till the crockery in the ship's pantry began to crash and the screw to make endless

\* "Let him in January born  
Get up upon his legs;  
And gently raise his drinking-horn,  
And drain it to the dregs.  
Drink up! drink up! drink up!"

*Chorus.* "He's drunk it up, the game old cock!  
He shall not be our laughing-stock!"

revolutions in the air, but would go to bed as soon as the steamer was in the open, to live on champagne and all the delicacies that could be provided till Woosung and the mouth of the Shanghai river came in sight.

"I thought you and Mr. Kennedy were such friends," Mrs. Ratcliff went on. "I'm sure he never left your side. A nice-looking, gentlemanly young fellow too. Didn't he ever make love to you, Violet?"

The steamer had come opposite the spot on the island where Mr. Watkins was stationed to make his final signals of farewell. Mrs. Ratcliff vigorously waved her handkerchief in answer; but the part of her year wherein Mr. Watkins was the central figure was over and, so far as her sentiments touching him were concerned, done with. She was already thinking far more of what she was going to do, and to be, in Shanghai than of the "bear with a sore head," as Mrs. Denman would call him that evening, left alone on Kulangsu. Indeed, Wilfrid Kennedy and Violet actually interested her more than her own "friend" at that moment.

"Mr. Kennedy couldn't make love to me," Violet answered bitterly, for she was feeling hurt that Wilfrid had not come to say goodbye. "He is going home to be married."

"Is he really?" Mrs. Ratcliff asked with the eagerest interest. "Who to? Did he shew you her photo? Is she pretty? Where did he meet her?"

"I haven't seen her photo," Violet said crossly. "He was engaged to her before he came out to China, and she's ever so much older than he is!"

"Dear me, what a pity!" cried Mrs. Ratcliff. "But I dare say she has money; there must be some attraction somewhere. I'm sorry all the same for him, for he's a nice young fellow, and it's quite a shame that he has got to sacrifice himself. Just see, Violet, how wrongly the world judges. Mrs. Denman thought

he was in love with you, and that you were in love with him. I knew *you* better, but I wasn't sure of *him*. I thought, and still think, he couldn't trust himself to say goodbye to you. And now he has to go and marry some one else; and even if he hadn't got to marry *her*, he never could have married *you*!"

This was the longest moralisation Violet had ever heard from her mother. It was a consoling one too; not only because it was all about a man whom Violet longed to hear discussed, even should the discussion consist of blame, but also comforting, because it gave a flattering reason for Wilfrid's apparent neglect in not coming on board. Violet would not have been bored if Mrs. Ratcliff had discoursed on the same topic all the way up to Shanghai, some three days or more. But the steamer gave first a pitch, and then a roll, and Chapel Island, outside the harbour, began to grow closer and closer.

"Goodbye, Violet. I'm off!"

And Mrs. Ratcliff clattered down the brass-bound companion, and, heedless of the terrific groans and unearthly sounds that came from her *amah*, already prostrate with sea-sickness, retired to the seclusion of her own cabin.

And Wilfrid Kennedy went his usual way, which no longer led him to the Commissioner's house. But he put Violet's photograph carefully away in his despatch-box, and wasn't quite such good company at a *jambarree* as of old. This fact he excused on the ground of his having been so many years out in China, and laughed at himself as requiring nothing but the sea-voyage to set himself to rights again. And the sea-voyage was only a few weeks off now.

They had a grand gathering the night before he went away, and the German Baron was in full form and voice. But when the time-honoured birthday song was proposed, for the first time since he had come to Amoy, Wilfrid Kennedy made himself disagreeable.

"I hate that song," he said, bluntly. "You all get fearfully flat, as flat as pancakes, in the chorus. If you sing it I shall go."

"You didn't object to it a little while ago," sneered the Baron, who was very angry at being charged with flatness. "And Miss Ratcliff, she liked it too!"

"That doesn't matter to me," Kennedy answered hotly. "If you *will* sing it, goodnight!"

And so they did not.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mrs. Ratcliff had a busy time of it when she got back to Shanghai. First, she had to prepare for her summer trip to the sanatorium of China—Chefoo—which meant any amount of tailors, worry, vexation, stuffs spoiled, meals late, and abundance of strong language from Mr. Ratcliff. The going to Chefoo was a necessity, for Violet's sake. Violet who was losing all her pretty colour, and her appetite, and who seemed to care for nothing but just shutting herself up in her bedroom and reading poetry. Since she had come from Amoy, Violet had taken to reading Byron, not to speak of *In Memoriam*. In consequence of which absorption (for which, it is to be feared, Wilfrid Kennedy was responsible) Violet had become absolutely useless to her mother as regarded the criticism of clothes. She never seemed to know now whether the back of a bodice was crooked or straight, and could no longer be relied upon for the looping of skirts, or even the placing of bonnets. Never was mother more disappointed in a daughter.

And so they went to Chefoo, and Violet Ratcliff's colour came back a brick red, and her hands freckled, and her neck got scarecrowy. The air of China certainly did not suit her.

But as she was the only girl in the Ratcliff "set" she had plenty of admirers, who were allowed to worship her from a distance. For Violet's destiny had long ago been fixed for her by her parents, in one memorable talk with her husband for

which Mrs. Ratcliff had found time just before their daughter came out from home. Violet was to be married to one of Mr. Ratcliff's oldest friends, the *taipan* of Davison, Arkwright and Co., the richest firm in the whole East, and that as soon as the summer was over.

It was a splendid match, in spite of the trifling circumstance that the bridegroom was older than the bride's father. He looked so, too; but then, as Mrs. Ratcliff explained to such of her acquaintances as required the explanation, Violet had never cared for young men, and was far more suited to an older man than to a "boy." To which declaration Violet herself fully agreed.

So there was a very grand wedding in Shanghai, at which Mrs. Ratcliff wore a dress made expressly for the occasion by Worth, and which cost a small fortune. Champagne flowed by the gallon, and the very Chinese servants became wasteful, and indifferent to the amount of pilfering done by "outside" men. And there was a long account of the whole concern in the *London and China Telegraph*, for the benefit of Mr. and Mrs. Ratcliff's and Mr. Davison's old friends and acquaintances at home.

But in the same paper, just underneath the official notice in the "Marriages" column, came another record. And when Violet cut out the announcement that concerned herself, the next one came out too.

"KENNEDY—BARNES.—On December 1st, at the Abbey, Bath, Wilfrid Kennedy, I.M. Customs, China, to Louisa Ellen Barnes."

---

PART II.

---

## CHAPTER I.

“Kennedy, just look in at that window!”

They had been working late hours in the Custom House at Shanghai, and Kennedy and his old chum Edwards had been kept on this particular evening up to eight o'clock. For Kennedy's two years' leave was over; and when he and his wife had reached Hongkong they had found orders awaiting them to proceed at once to Shanghai, where the Customs office was short-handed and business pressing. And thus it had come about that on the very next day after his arrival, and before he could look out for a house, far less unpack, Wilfrid had been obliged to spend all his time in the office,—which was distinctly hard on him, but harder still on his wife. But then the Shanghai Commissioner was an ultra red-tape martinet, and an anti-English German to boot, while Kennedy was not a “fighting” man.

“Which window?” Wilfrid asked listlessly. He was dreadfully tired, and the motion of the steamer still seemed to jar in his head. He was wishing Edwards, good fellow though he was, anywhere, at the bottom of the river or up on the crosstrees of the British Consulate flag-staff, now at this moment, when the two had just come out into the sweltering steamy air of a Shanghai September night, and when he, Wilfrid, was going home to dine

in the noisy stifling coffee-room of the hotel, where the occupants of the next table to his might be smoking, or staring, or . . . doing any one of those thousand and one things no dweller in the East dreams of being horrified at, but which ladies fresh from Bath take a little time to get accustomed to.

"Which window? Why, the one we are just passing. Look in, and you'll see a picture of domestic felicity."

And Wilfrid Kennedy looked as he was told, and saw:—

A large window, shaded by heavy handsome curtains, the curtains of a rich and prosperous *hong*. The window was wide open, and the room brilliantly lighted. It was a dining-room, and the master and the mistress of the house were sitting at dinner, one at each end of a long elaborately decorated table. They were quite alone, nor were there any signs of other guests having been expected. They had not yet finished their meal, but it was not what they were eating that was interesting Edwards, and to which he was drawing Wilfrid Kennedy's attention.

Before each of the two diners lay an open book, out of which they were complacently reading. They read as they ate, and when, on their laying down their knives and forks, their plates were swiftly changed by the "boys" in attendance, they still went on reading. Neither took the faintest notice of the other's presence.

Almost unconsciously, the two men outside had stood still to look in, and Kennedy had to pull his friend by the sleeve, lest perchance one of the two diners—the husband it must have been, for he sat facing the window—should see them. For the dining-room happened to be just at an angle of the house, which here touched the Bund, the great Shanghai Bund along the river.

"They are always like that," whispered Edwards as they moved slowly away. "Every time I pass that window, if they are at dinner, they are always reading. I've never once seen either of them take any notice of the other. How ghastly it

must be for their digestions!—or rather for *his*. I don't suppose Mrs. Davison is old enough to have a digestion yet."

"Who are they?" Kennedy asked with a sudden catch up of his breath. "What *hong* is it?"

"The Davisons of Davison Arkwright—surely you know the *hong*? Didn't you notice it this morning? It's a magnificent house, built from a design by some swell architect. Ah, I forgot; you've never been stationed in Shanghai before. But you must have heard of old Davison, even if you haven't already heard of his wife. He married her two years ago, a girl young enough to be his granddaughter. Surely you have heard the whole story? Mrs. Davison is a daughter of Mrs. Ratcliff that was, the Mrs. Ratcliff they used to call the beauty of China. Mrs. Davison, by the way, isn't a patch on her!"

"I have met them, both the mother and the daughter," Kennedy struck in. For though he felt a strong desire to get from his friend Edwards that fuller information which is the privilege of the stranger, it would not have been prudent to allow the impression to remain that he did not already know Mrs. Davison. "I met them in Amoy two years ago. They were staying with the Commissioner."

"Watkins, wasn't it? He comes into the story too. Mr. Ratcliff married his daughter to old Davison, and then went smash. What do you think of that? The old rogue must have known what was going to happen, and you may guess if Davison wasn't sold! For he was not a marrying man, you know, and it didn't suit his household arrangements at all to have a Ratcliff without a penny to her name on his hands. Well, Mrs. Ratcliff found out she must go home and see some aged aunt, or cousin, and who should escort her but Mr. Watkins? He had made his pile, had Watkins, so he resigned the service, and was just going to enjoy himself when he stupidly died, and left Mrs. Ratcliff everything. Old Ratcliff then went home; there was a grand



reconciliation, and the two are living like fighting-cocks, they tell me, in the charming nest Watkins had prepared for himself. Upon my word, Kennedy, the cheek some people have!" Here he put his head closer to Wilfrid's, and imparted some items of Club "gup" which would have scandalised horribly more liberal-minded ladies than Mrs. Wilfrid Kennedy, for instance.

"But all this has nothing to do with Mrs. Davison, has it? What do people say of her?"

A very rash question this was, as Wilfrid knew even before the answer came. What could that answer be but a painful one, in view of that window? And Kennedy disliked pain, mental or otherwise, even more than he disliked hard work.

"Mrs. Davison? Oh, she's just such another as her mother, or will be in time. But there's some excuse for her,—tied, sold if you like it, to that pompous old beast. He used to be a very well known figure in certain walks of society in Shanghai. Mrs. Davison doesn't waste her time in being agreeable to him, does she? But the saying goes that she only married Davison because she was jilted, or something of the kind. At any rate there's no doubt that she has made no pretence of loving her husband, either when she was married or since. In love with some one else; the old yarn! No, she isn't very popular, not nearly so popular as her mother used to be. As for him, he's a stuck-up old idiot. I'd like to have the kicking of him!"

This idea was probably suggested to Edwards' mind by a jinricksha coolie who had just dropped the shafts of his vehicle invitingly but perilously across his path. In the absence of Mr. Davison, the young man contented himself with administering a sound kick to the Celestial, after which he cheerfully bade Kennedy goodnight.

And Wilfrid took a few steps more in the direction of his hotel. Then he turned sharp round, and walked straight back towards the Custom House, until he came to that dining-room window.

He had two reasons for taking this extra walk. First, his head ached ; and second, he wanted to look at Violet Davison all by himself. And this might be the only available opportunity for some time to come.

They had finished dinner now, and Mr. Davison, the "pompous old beast," was abandoning himself to an enormous cheroot in a very large armchair. There was a good deal of him to abandon, and he was doing so in a comfortable but distinctly inelegant fashion. For the rest, he looked the typical *taipan* of the good old days, with a bald shining head, a good breadth of waistcoat, and a short thick red neck suggestive of apoplexy. Clearly not a husband to fall desperately in love with ; clearly not such a husband as his own wife ought to have chosen.

His wife!—was she indeed the Violet Ratcliff he had known, and remembered too, all these years, as without any exception the very nicest girl he had ever met, the only girl, indeed woman, who was worth remembering? Was he really looking at her face now?

For Mrs. Davison's face was no longer hidden from view. She was standing close to the window, so close that if she had only looked down, and perhaps back in her memory, she must have recognised her old friend.

But, how the two years had changed her ! How ill, how worn she looked ! The healthy colour was gone, the roundness of the face and figure, with the "school-girlishness" of the Amoy days. Mrs. Davison had perhaps gained dignity from being a *taipan's* wife, for at any rate she looked self-reliant and determined. But to Wilfrid Kennedy's eyes she also looked miserable.

And he stood there, and gazed, and took in with a sorrowful surprise that the Violet Ratcliff of his recollection was something past and dead, and that the Violet Davison he was going to know might be very charming, very friendly, but must stand on a footing quite different from that of old days. And he thought

in his mind, as he slowly turned homewards, that it was altogether a mistake ever again to come across some one who has made a great impression on you in past years. For it is pitiful to see, or to fancy one sees, that as regards happiness, if not looks, Time does not always "bear gently on those we love."

---

## CHAPTER II.

"Mr. Kennedy, you *are* a nice one ! Actually going to cut me, an old acquaintance !"

It was a few days after the Kennedys' arrival in Shanghai, and just after office hours. And it was Mrs. Denman of Amoy fame who was barring Wilfrid's way. She was coming straight out of the Astor House where she had, presumably, just been to call upon Wilfrid's wife. For the Kennedys were still in that most miserable strait betwixt two, vulgarly called living in boxes, though the move into their own house was to come off before very long.

But, though Wilfrid of course knew the Denmans were now stationed in Shanghai, as he could not help knowing when he saw Mr. Denman every day at the Custom House, he had failed to notice the smart little brougham with the *mafoos* in official caps drawn up at the hotel gate. He had, moreover, failed to notice the elegant little lady with the fluffy golden hair and (alas for English complexions!) powdered face, who was coming out of the porch, tinkling, by reason of her many bracelets, like the apostolic cymbal, the admired of a group of American "globetrotters" just outside the central door of the hotel.

"Mrs. Denman ! I beg your pardon ! I didn't recognise you !"

"That's not very complimentary," laughed Mrs. Denman, keeping her position in the middle of the path. "But I suppose I must have changed in these two years or more since we met. Heighho! we're all growing old! All except you, Mr. Kennedy, you've grown younger since you were married!"

Lucky for Mrs. Denman that she had got the name for saying the most ill-timed things without ever meaning them! Lucky, too, that she was saying them to Wilfrid Kennedy without any witnesses present. Even he, good-natured fellow though he was, felt himself flushing up as Mrs. Denman went on to say:—

"I've just been to call on your wife. Of course I was dying to see her directly I heard you were coming to Shanghai. I wanted to know what kind of a wife a man like you would choose, because in Amoy we all thought—But no matter!"

Mrs. Denman suddenly checked herself and realised that she was the cynosure of the porch. She moved slowly towards her brougham.

"I wanted to see you as well as Mrs. Kennedy," she said. "You ought to have come in sooner. I want you to come to see me and have a chat about old times. There are some old friends in Shanghai, too, do you know that? When will you come? Say to tiffin on Sunday; I'll write Mrs. Kennedy a *chit*. Tiffin at 12 sharp, and we can talk afterwards."

A very ordinary China coast invitation, seeing Sunday was the only free day for the Customs staff. What then was Mrs. Denman's astonishment when Wilfrid answered, in an exceedingly embarrassed voice:

"Thank you very much, but I'm afraid we can't come. The fact of the matter is, my wife won't go anywhere on Sunday!"

Mrs. Denman was so amazed that she blurted out:—

"You don't mean to say you've married a missionary?"

Judging by the expression on her countenance, missionary and leper were about synonymous to Mrs. Denman.

"Oh no, she isn't a missionary," Wilfrid tried to explain. "Only she's been brought up very religiously (I was too, you know), and has still got home-views on the Sabbath. She'll lose them in time, but not quite at first. And I don't want you to shock her, Mrs. Denman. You've often shocked me, you remember!"

Which winding-up gratified Mrs. Denman immensely, and sent her off in the most friendly of moods towards Wilfrid. She smiled and nodded to him out of the carriage window as long as she could see him,—and then threw herself back in her seat and mentally contemplated the situation which had just been placed before her.

What a curious, ill-assorted marriage this must be, to be sure, the more you looked into it! Mrs. Denman had of course seen the announcement in the newspapers, and had lamented the fact before she had any reason for so doing,—simply because it upset a nice little romance she had woven in her brain. Then the Denmans had been ordered to Shanghai, and there Mrs. Denman had been thrown a good deal together with Violet Davison, who, poor girl, wanted a woman-friend badly in her new life.

Violet Davison, as a rich merchant's wife, was of course one of the leaders of Shanghai society. In that exclusive "upper ten" she now moved, which barely knew of the existence of a Deputy-Commissioner of Customs, and for which, in those good old golden days, Consular and Customs Assistants were naught and as the small dust of the balance. A pompous, interminably lengthy-dinnered, mentally-empty set they were, those *taipans*, who thought the world existed for their benefit alone, and that to take a lady down to dinner and to address an occasional platitude to her—only and solely in between the courses—was the greatest honour that lady could receive. But the world of Shanghai took them at their own valuation, and Mrs. Denman was cordially hated

by all those who were not so fortunate as to be admitted within the sacred circle.

Mrs. Denman's friendship with Violet Davison, which had somewhat astonished Mr. Davison at first, was really the most natural thing in the world. There was something in the Deputy-Commissioner's wife which invited confidences, even though the confiding party knew that what she was so foolish as to tell would certainly not remain locked up within Mrs. Denman's breast. Violet was one of those wholly unself-controlled girls who cannot keep their grievances to themselves. Her early married life was one of rude disillusionment, and when at the age of five months her baby died, and Mrs. Denman came to sympathise and lament with and console her, Violet completely broke down. Secrets that were, alas! no secrets to the rest of Shanghai, but which a proud wife should have held up as a barrier between the mocking world and herself—these came out; and with these secrets of her married life a half-confession of her girlish days. There was such a relief, such a feeling akin to joy, in saying once more a name which pride had never let her say before, in explaining how *she* alone was responsible for what Mrs. Denman had actually called to her face,—to Violet's, who had told him to go,—Wilfrid's desertion! Even the after-reproaches of prudence, that by speaking as she had done she had put herself into Mrs. Denman's power, were silenced by a remembrance of the satisfaction it had been to watch the changes, from interest to astonishment, from astonishment to the tears of over-wrought feeling, in Mrs. Denman's face.

And for once Mrs. Denman had held her tongue, and kept Violet's secret. Indeed, she did not consider the story Violet had told her worth retailing, since Mrs. Davison would probably have half-a-dozen such experiences in half that number of years, and coupled with Shanghai names also,—which would be far more interesting to the people of that Model Settlement.

Mrs. Denman had in general a very small opinion of the constancy of women's affections. On at least five separate occasions she had been firmly convinced that she herself and some particularly intimate chum of her husband's were about to figure in the newspapers. And the sequel to such imaginations had invariably been some utterly commonplace drifting apart, such as a transfer to another port, the advent of another rival, male or female, the getting tired of each other, etc. etc. Taught by these experiences, Mrs. Denman had at length arrived at the conclusion that her own husband, a big, hulking, good-natured fellow over six feet, was as good as any other man,—in short, that all men were so alike that there was no palpable advantage to be got out of a change of spouse. Violet would doubtless have her five, maybe her six or seven, occasions of falling in love. The Kennedy episode was the first, but it would distinctly not be the last. Her last love must be, if not Mr. Davison himself, at any rate his comfortable establishment.

Still, when Mrs. Denman heard of the Kennedys' arrival, and still more, when she saw what Mrs. Kennedy was like, she certainly scented possible complications ahead. That is, she felt convinced that what Violet had told her about Wilfrid's confession in Amoy had been true (of the details of which confession she had naturally been sceptical up to the present time); and, furthermore, that there must be a distinct incompatibility of temperament between Wilfrid and his wife.

"A prim old maid, who won't see forty in a hurry again," Mrs. Denman summed Mrs. Kennedy up. "That boy, that child, tied to her for life! Truly money is the root of all evil!"

And to guard against the possible effects of that evil, Mrs. Denman stopped her carriage at the most fashionable store in the place, and relieved her mind by adding several items to her already heavy bill.

But she could not altogether banish the thought of "that



boy" and his "missionary-looking" wife. Mrs. Denman had always felt it to be her mission in life to afford relief to distressed partners in matrimony. Was the husband the aggrieved party? She allowed him to fall love with herself. Was it the wife? She must be thrown together with some trusted friend of the male persuasion with whom she might strike up a Platonic friendship. But as regarded Violet Davison and Wilfrid Kennedy, would it be wise, would it be even safe, to put them together? Mrs. Denman tried hard to think "yes"; but she was not altogether easy on the subject in her own mind by the time she reached home.

And Wilfrid Kennedy went up the stairs and into his own room with a light heart. He had made the plunge, and had asserted his true position with his old acquaintances. It would have been easy enough to have made an excuse for this one Sunday tiffin; in olden times Wilfrid most assuredly would have done so. But, how much easier would life be for him now that he had spoken out! No one would titter when they saw him carrying his wife's prayer-book to Church next Sunday. They would have done their tittering in the week, when—

"How late you are, Wilfrid! You promised to be home at a quarter past four, and it is a quarter to five! I have been watching you for the last ten minutes talking to that—what's her name?—Mrs. Denman. I cannot think how any one making a pretence to be a lady can go about dressed as she is, and stand and talk where everybody is staring at her. What an example to the heathen round her! No wonder they think their worship of idols is better than our religion, since the English ladies in China are *their* specimens of Christian women! Poor women, indeed! with no thought beyond dress, no conversation but balls!"

Mrs. Kennedy spoke rather loud, as though she was addressing a large audience. This inconvenient habit had grown upon her during the last few years of her maiden life, and its cause had been the deafness of both her parents. Still it was very mortifying

---

to Wilfrid to now feel certain that every word had been heard, and that every dangerous comment on Mrs. Denman would probably be treasured up for future repetition by that arrant gossip Tom Edwards, who had followed him up the stairs, and who now stood at the door awaiting permission to enter to pay his duty-call.

---

## CHAPTER III.

"Flossie, who is that awful frump sitting in the second row, next to the Commissioner? No, on the other side. Who can she be? I don't know the face at all."

The Davisons were, of course, occupying the best box at the *Lyceum* at the first performance of an especially strong theatrical troupe which was passing through Shanghai. And there, in front of the box, Violet Davison and her friend Mrs. Denman were quizzing the people down below them, to the great delight of two youthful swains in close attendance. Mr. Davison, in a stiff white waistcoat of prodigious latitude, sat in the centre of the box, condescension to the stage and to society in general radiating from him in all directions. Mr. Denman was smoking a cigar outside.

"That? oh, don't you know? It's the bride, the wife of Wilfrid Kennedy of our service."

"No!"

Violet's face had flushed crimson, and she hastily put up her opera-glasses again, as if to take a good look at the unconscious stranger. But her hand shook ominously, and Mrs. Denman was not astonished to see her put the glasses down carelessly, right on the ledge of the box, plant her elbows, and give

herself up to a long and steady stare at the second row of stalls.

Yes, Mrs. Kennedy *did* look a frump. She was dressed—and this in the days when all the world wore frills, furbelows, and ornaments—in a most unbecomingly simple manner. Small wonder Mrs. Denman had set her down as a missionary. Her hair, sandy and painfully, *i.e.* stickily, smooth, was plastered over her ears and then screwed into the most diminutive “Grecian” knot behind. Her dress, of plainest black silk, was ornamented simply by a huge black enamel locket, of the warming-pan type, fastened round her neck with narrow purple ribbons, which fell down her back considerably below her waist. A regular old maid.

As yet her face was invisible; for, although the performance had not yet begun, she kept her eyes rigidly fixed on the drop-curtain. Violet took up the glasses again, and looked along the row.

There *he* was, sitting quite at the end, looking vacantly round the gallery. He had begun at the opposite end to Violet’s box, and was working his way towards it. Changed was he? Yes, surely; but not for the better. He was not so trim as he used to be; he looked discontented; he looked infinitely tired. He was paying no attention to what his neighbour, a fashionably dressed young matron, was saying to him. No, he certainly did not look happy; and Violet felt actually glad he did not.

And then, just at that moment, just as his eyes were reaching her box, the orchestra struck up “We met, ’twas in a crowd,” and Violet’s opera-glasses fell from her hands down, right down among the people who were sitting below. And at the crash Mrs. Kennedy turned her head.

Hers was by no means an unpleasant, though it was an unsympathetic face. It was round and fairly plump, though candour forces the admission that when Mrs. Denman compared

her complexion with the rind of a pumelo, and the consistency of her cheeks with an over-ripe persimmon, she did not greatly overshoot the mark. The expression of this distinctly homely countenance, in which both eyes and nose were quite unimportant landmarks, was that of resigned martyrdom. Mrs. Kennedy evidently had not come to the theatre to enjoy herself. (As a matter of fact, she was there under a mistake, and solely as the Commissioner's dinner-guest.)

All this Violet missed, all, everything and everybody, in the new and curious sensation that seized her, and made her lose, for the time being, all consciousness of her surroundings. Wilfrid Kennedy's eyes were fixed on her, as were those of the whole theatre. But the look in his eyes was one she saw nowhere else, and it only lasted a short part of a minute. But Mrs. Denman caught it as well, and she hastily bent forward and whispered to her friend:—

“Everyone is looking at you, Violet.”

The warning was enough. Wilfrid Kennedy did not manage to catch Violet's eye again all that evening.

---

## CHAPTER IV.

"I am going to call on the Kennedys, Flossie."

"No, don't. I beg you not to, Violet."

Violet had come in for a quiet cup of tea and chat with her friend. Mrs. Denman had issued orders of "No got" to the *boy*,—very necessary orders, as the almost continuous stopping of carriages and ringing of the doorbell shewed. The Denmans were popular in Shanghai, although Mr. Watkins' old designation of Flossie as "giggling goose" still clung to that little lady.

"Why not?"

A, for Violet, wonderfully disingenuous question, to which she already knew the answer, an answer she was not likely to get out of Mrs. Denman.

"You will make a very great mistake if you try to cultivate Mrs. Kennedy," Flossie Denman answered. "She is really a terrible woman! She's frightfully religious, and has come to China with the intention of converting all the natives at one fell swoop. I believe she's got serious designs on the Emperor's seraglio, not to say his heart! And so, of course, she wouldn't have anything to do with us worldly people. You should have heard Tom Edwards imitating her going for me—poor, innocent, harmless ME—to her own meek goose of a husband. Tom heard

it all the other side of the street, for she bawls, my dear. Now, don't call on her; she'll ask you about your soul. Why, she even tackled the Commissioner!"

"Well, I don't expect she got much out of him," Violet remarked languidly. "She must be rather amusing, I think. But can't her husband keep her in order?"

"Mr. Kennedy? You know him of old; he could never say *Bo* to a goose! I've no patience with that kind of man! A man who lets himself be made the laughing-stock of all Shanghai, and why? Simply because *she* holds the purse-strings, and *he* hasn't a cent to bless himself with. Went home over head and ears in debt, married for money, and hasn't begun to pay up yet. A most contemptible man!"

Mrs. Denman kept her face steadily turned away until just towards the end of her speech. Then she stole a glance out of the corner of one eye at Violet, to see the effect she had produced.

Not the right one, alas! Violet was impatiently biting her under lip, and one foot was restlessly beating time, swinging in the air just above the fender. These signs might have stood for disgust and disappointment in any one else; but they did not in the present case. For down the cheek that was nearest to Mrs. Denman there was stealing—was it possible?—a tear.

Mrs. Denman was angry. Violet was quite too ridiculous about this man. She took up her parable again.

"If you called and became intimate with them (which you couldn't do without mortally offending the Rodneys, and the Harrisons, and the de Clancys, who are all senior to Mr. Kennedy in the service, and on whom you never called), you would have to invite these Kennedys and they would invite you back. Fancy Mr. Davison at their house! No wine on the table; only tea to drink. The minute after tea, if you please, out comes the Bible, each one is made to read a verse round, and then come prayers. Positively, that's what happened to Mr. Edwards when

Mr. Kennedy invited him in to potluck. He told me he was so faint, so thirsty, and so stiff he could scarcely drag his limbs home!"

"Haven't you got any better authority than Mr. Edwards?" Violet asked sarcastically. "I wonder how he describes other people's entertainments!"

Mrs. Denman made no answer. She was, in truth, flabbergasted at Violet's retort.

"Flossie," Violet said suddenly, bending over and laying her hand caressingly on Mrs. Denman's knee, "you haven't convinced me; you can't convince me. Why is he so weak, so, what you call contemptible? I know; I can understand it. And if this silly, foolish woman is estranging all his friends, and making his life a misery to him, am I, who was his first friend, who knew all his secrets, am I going to stand by and not give him a helping hand? No, ten thousand times no! If all you say is true (and I had heard most of it already), then he wants all the comfort he can get from knowing I have not changed. For *his* sake, I will make a friend of his wife!"

"You are absolutely cracked, Violet," Mrs. Denman calmly replied, "and, what is more, you are dangerously cracked. You delude yourself into the idea that to know you will have a soothing effect on Wilfrid Kennedy's poor tried nerves. It can only have one effect, if you go into this concern with your head so completely on fire. That's a bad one. I don't need to explain it to you."

"You mean," Violet answered, "that Mrs. Kennedy will be jealous of me. But she won't be. I shan't clash with her in the least. You'll see; I shall come out of this all right!"

"But I'm not thinking of Mrs. Kennedy!" urged Mrs. Denman. "You couldn't move her one way or another so as to affect *my* peace of mind. But, to be frank with you, Violet, what will you do if Mr. Kennedy won't go back to the



old conditions, if he is afraid of making a friend of you, lest he should again fall in love with you? For he was in love, and you know it. That's one possibility you have got to face. Or, suppose he does go back, and consults you and confides in you again, and ends by falling in love with you,—what will you do then?"

"I'll think about those things when the time arrives!" Violet answered evasively. "But you must help me, Flossie. You must take me to call on this dragon. When will you go?"

"Have you asked Mr. Davison's leave yet?"

"Ask *his* leave?" Violet said scornfully. "Do I ever ask his leave? When do I ever see him, or wish to see him, to ask? You know quite well we have agreed never to see each other except at meals or in company. No; he goes his own way, and I mean to go mine."

"Hoity-toity! my lady is on her high horse!"

But even as Mrs. Denman uttered these words, her heart smote her, and by the very decided way in which she blew her nose, and then clattered the tea-cups, Violet knew that there was no further need for argument.

---

## CHAPTER V.

"Whose writing is that, Louisa?"

Wilfrid knew very well whose it was all the time. He had often seen it before; he had even got a specimen of it locked away in his despatch box.

Mrs. Kennedy was wrestling with her house-accounts, and so was in a bad temper. It is the destiny, not to be evaded by any housekeeper in the East, of the foreign mistress to be "squeezed" by her servants. That means, the native servants in each household make up their minds that so much of their masters' income is to find its way into their own pockets. And find its way it will, whether the master lives in luxury or in poverty-stricken destitution of the good things of this life. Appreciating which fact, the worldly-wise among the foreign ladies insist on their servants providing them with the best of everything. Nor do they spend a cent more, according to their means, than do other ladies in their own station of life who diligently enquire into last day's potatoes, amounts of sugar, butter, or who buy their fish and game at its real market value.

But Mrs. Kennedy disapproved of "squeezes"; and, under the guidance of one of the crack housekeepers of Shanghai, had found out all about market prices, and was determined to pay

no more than what was just and lawful. The Kennedy servants, however, knew how to deal with a recalcitrant housekeeper like their mistress. The boy's accounts lay before her now, totalling up to an unjust amount, under such items as "brooms," "mend-buckets," and "firewood" in sufficient quantity to stock an entire shop. And when the existence of these articles was challenged, they had all, wonderful to say, been produced, and now lay piled up, a most unsightly mass, in the very middle of the drawing-room floor.

"Whose writing? I don't remember. Look at the note for yourself."

Mrs. Kennedy did not waste her time in being courteous to her husband. It was so difficult for her to realise how changed their relations to each other were since the days when Wilfrid was a little boy and she a grown-up young lady! So difficult to realise that, though he was so much younger than she was, yet he was her husband, and as such might shake off her unlawful authority some day. And what a day would that be, in the case of a nature like Wilfrid's! She was drawing the rein even now dangerously tight.

"Have you answered this *chit*, Louisa?"

"Of course I have," she answered testily. "I wish you wouldn't come and ask me questions when you see I am busy! By the way, Wilfrid, you *must* send away the boy. I simply refuse to keep him any longer. When you were so late coming home last night I went down into the cookhouse, and there I found a crowd of Chinese all busy over some idolatrous rites. They were making some horrible sticky sort of paste on my beautiful new pastryboard, for their idols to eat, if you please. Of course I said it must be all thrown away. And the *boy* refused to do so! He said:—'Chinaman one year one time must makey so fashion.' Well, if he *must*, he shan't do it here, and so I told him. And he actually answered me:—'Master savvey what

thing!’ I’ve slept over the matter, and now I’ve made up my mind. You must dismiss the boy.”

He was Wilfrid’s last and only link with the old life, this boy who had lived with him in all the bad, unhealthy ports he had ever been stationed in, and who had so often tended him when he was sick. He had been doomed for some weeks, Wilfrid knew; and probably there was a smug-faced, oily-mouthed *protégé* of some friend of Mrs. Kennedy ready to step into his billet. What was the use of defending this Chinaman any more? Bachelors’ boys never do manage to get on with a foreign lady in the house.

“Very well, Louisa. Did you accept this invitation?”

“Mrs. Davison’s invitation? No, I didn’t. I refused it.”

Mrs. Kennedy had a peculiar way of pursing up her lips when a dangerous topic was being touched upon. Her lips were pursed up now.

“Any reason?” Wilfrid asked carelessly. “I thought you told me the other day, after she had called, that you liked Mrs. Davison very much, and that”——

“Well, what else did I say?” demanded Mrs. Kennedy, fixing her eyes on her husband’s face.

“I don’t remember exactly,” Wilfrid answered a little hotly. “But what have you got against her now? She’s the wife of the leading man in Shanghai, and she goes out of her way to call on you, and then to invite you to dinner. May I ask why, without even consulting me, you have refused?”

“I would rather not give you my reasons, Wilfrid; but I have them, and if you insist on it, I will give them. But I’d rather not continue the subject.”

Mrs. Kennedy got up from her writing-table, and seated herself in a comfortable armchair near the fire, all ready to be asked. In truth, she had foreseen this episode, and had left the *chit* lying about in order to attract Wilfrid’s attention.

“I *do* insist, Louisa.”

For one short moment Mrs. Kennedy looked up at him in what was astonishment. She did not know that voice; but the look reassured her. Wilfrid's eyes were as soft, as submissive, she thought, as ever.

But she did not know what words, ringing in his ears still, were calling up that soft look. They were Violet's words, when he had taken her out to her carriage after her first call.

"I hope your wife will like me, Mr. Kennedy. She looks so good, and I want her dreadfully to be friends with me!"

And he had gone back, with a delicious warmth at his heart, and had repeated them to his wife, and she had smiled, and looked pleased. What had come now?

"I will not go to the house of any woman, I will not accept her hospitality, I will have nothing to do with her,—so long as she is living in open sin!"

"In open sin? Mrs. Davison living in open sin? What *do* you mean, Louisa?"

The idea was too utterly ludicrous, absurd even beyond a laugh. Wilfrid felt a great weight lifted from his heart. His wife evidently had no glimmering of what might have proved an objection,—his old acquaintance with Violet.

But Mrs. Kennedy pursed up her lips tighter.

"What tag-end of gossip have you got? Who put such an idea into your head? Is that your Christianity, to believe lies about people?"

Wilfrid was getting angry now, and was not stopping to measure his words.

"Explain yourself, Louisa, if you make accusations against my friends."

Ah! there the point came in: she was his friend. Mrs. Kennedy was already half-suspecting that would-be friend of hers: her old-maidish prudery, which but thinly concealed her old-maidish love for dubious stories, was flung aside at once.

"No, it was none of my Christian friends, as you sneeringly call them, who told me of *your* 'friend.' They, forsooth, are not good enough for her, I suppose, and they don't trouble to speak, far less think of her. It was Mrs. Davison's own particular friend, Mrs. Denman, who told me, and told me not as against Mrs. Davison at all. On the contrary, she looks upon her as a martyr. A martyr, with carriages and horses, and luxury,—the wages of sin forsooth!"

Mrs. Kennedy seized the poker, and stirred the fire as viciously as though she was performing the task for Violet's spirit in the Chinese Purgatory.

"What was it Mrs. Denman told you?"

Again Mrs. Kennedy stole a look at Wilfrid. But he had turned his back on her, and was examining the blotting-book on the writing-table.

"She told me that Mrs. Davison's had been a most miserable marriage, that she had been forced into it before she was old enough to know her own mind. And, could you believe it, this Mr. Davison, this great merchant, is in reality, and has always been, a most abandoned, sinful man? The life he led before his marriage it made me blush to hear of. I am sure, quite sure, that if only half of what Mrs. Denman said is true, he would never be received into respectable society at home. It must be only because he is so rich that he is not cut by the whole community here!"

There was absolute triumph in Mrs. Kennedy's voice. She did not wait for comment from Wilfrid, but went on:—

"And I do not pity a woman who, knowing her husband is what Mr. Davison is, knowing his past, and his present too, yet goes on living in his house, despising and hating him all the time. And so I told Mrs. Denman quite straight. And what was her excuse for having told me all these horrible particulars? That she had only done so to let me see how deeply Mrs. Davison was to be pitied, in spite of all her wealth, and to make me take

an interest in her! 'Interest? Mrs. Denman?' I answered, 'How can I take any interest in her now? To my mind 'Mrs. Davison has a plain duty before her, and she shrinks from 'doing it. As long as she lives with her husband, she tacitly 'consents to his life, past and present. She ought to leave him, 'and go back to her father's house.' 'How can she?' Mrs. Denman said, 'She's his wife. She must stay with him. 'Her own parents are thousands of miles away. And you are 'wrong in judging so hardly of Mr. Davison. He's no worse 'than heaps of others, as you ought to know.' 'I only judge by 'what you yourself have told me,' I said, 'and my judgment is 'that Mrs. Davison is wrong, and if she asks me I shall tell her 'so. And she said—'

Was it a groan that came from the writing-table? Mrs. Kennedy shifted her chair uneasily. And just then Wilfrid stood up and came to the fire.

"And so, because Mr. Davison makes his wife's life miserable, you refuse your friendship to a girl who has done you the kindness to offer you hers!"

Unwise words and unwise scorn! Mrs. Kennedy was ready for the fight at once.

"You may call things by wrong names as much as you like!" she retorted, "but you can't blind my eyes to what is right and to what is downright wrong! I feel, I know, Mrs. Davison is not a fit person for me to make a friend of, and so I intend to have nothing to do with her at all. I don't change my principles because I happen to live in China instead of in England."

"And have you told Mrs. Davison all this? Or have you left her friend, Mrs. Denman, to tell her?"

The withering contempt in Wilfrid's voice was too much for Mrs. Kennedy's temper.

"I will not stand this cross-examination any more!" she

cried angrily, her lips trembling with passion. "Find out for yourself if you want to know!"

And then, to her utter amazement, Wilfrid answered :—

"I will."

He had gone out of the drawing-room and out of the house before she had sufficiently recovered to call him back. And though she tried to think this was only a vague threat, and that his going only meant it was office-time (which she knew it was not), yet she felt uncomfortable all the rest of the afternoon with a shadowy suspicion that she had somehow or other gone too far. Nor did Wilfrid's reappearance, not very far from his usual time, satisfy her. For he merely came to tell her he was dining that evening at the Club, having to attend an important Committee meeting there afterwards.

Mrs. Kennedy had never dined alone before. But this first solitary meal was not destined to be the last.

---



## CHAPTER VI.

Never, in all his life, from his earliest years up, had Wilfrid Kennedy been so utterly angry as he was when he left his house that afternoon.

He was angry beyond control, either of words or of deeds. He could not have trusted himself to listen to that loud self-righteous voice a moment longer. What manner of woman was this he had married?

He forgot, utterly forgot, his wife's total ignorance of the wicked ways of the great world, quite forgot that she had been brought up amongst those who, never having been tried themselves, have no sympathy with the temptations of others. He could not think of an excuse for her; indeed he did not want to think of her at all. There was no room in his thoughts for any one but Violet, poor, poor Violet, to whom life had been nothing but a great disillusioning, from whom everything good had been taken away, and whom, instead of pitying, his own wife condemned, and condemned for the very reason she should have pitied her.

How could Mrs. Denman, Violet's friend, have made such a frightful mistake as to tell Mrs. Kennedy anything about Violet's inner life? And how was Wilfrid going to make the wrong right?

What wrong, indeed? Now that his anger was dying away

into this great pity for Violet, Wilfrid could begin to reason clearly, and it did not take very long for him to feel convinced that as yet Mrs. Kennedy could scarcely have done much harm. She might have, possibly, worded her refusal of Mrs. Davison's invitation ungraciously, but she could hardly have given any reasons for refusing. Mrs. Denman—truly a goose, and a cackling, mischievous one too—, was she likely to repeat that conversation he had just heard? No, ten thousand times no!

The danger was all ahead, and Wilfrid's course was clear. It was to warn Violet to keep out of his wife's way. They need never meet again; Shanghai was large enough for that. He must keep them apart, even though this meant keeping himself apart also.

And he must lose no time over giving his warning. He would see either Violet or Mrs. Denman that very afternoon, after office-hours.

It was very nearly office-time now, and he had been walking in an opposite direction to the Custom House. He must get back to it as soon as he could. Which was the shortest way?

Here he was, close to the (then) Cemetery gate. Through it lay his shortest way. Kennedy pushed the gate open, and walked in.

How quiet it all was in here, passing in from the noise and din of the busy street! The coolies grunting to each other as they carried their loads down towards the Bund; the squeaking of the ungreased wheelbarrows; the wrangling of two shrill-voiced women close outside;—all seemed to melt away into a single clash of sound, in which Wilfrid had no longer share or part. He, in the world, was outside the world, there, amongst those trees, amongst those sleepers, the very remembrance of whom had mostly faded away.

Only mostly, though. Here was one grave, one tiny grave, that was being tended even then. It did not lie near the main

path, but near that side one he had chosen. It was a child's grave, and the child's mother was bending over it.

The very woman, too, he had to seek, to find, and to warn against his own wife! How could he do so here, in this most sacred spot in all the world to her? Wilfrid turned on his heel, trying to beat a retreat as softly as possible. Alas for badly-seasoned boots! There was a most hideous squeak, and Violet had caught sight of him.

"Mr. Kennedy! Mr. Kennedy! I wanted to see you so much!"

All the colour left Wilfrid's face as a horrible fear sprang up in him. Was he then too late? Had she heard already?

Violet had risen from her knees, and came straight up to him.

"Mr. Kennedy," she said, and then stopped. What she had to say was evidently difficult, for she nervously twisted her bracelet (the old Chinese golden rope that he remembered so well) round and round.

"Mr. Kennedy, Mrs. Denman has told me——"

"Has told you," Wilfrid broke in, "what I don't think, and never have thought, and never can think! No, nor any one else whose opinion is worth having! But why did she tell you? I wanted to spare you this."

"You couldn't," Violet answered sadly. "I must have known it sooner or later. But you know me better!" she cried out, lifting her eyes suddenly to his face. "You believe in me always, don't you?"

Why did not the sky suddenly fall, or the ground open under their feet, or Providence, so ready to interfere when not wanted, separate those two at that moment? For with Violet's eyes, all full of unshed tears, and Violet's pretty lips quivering, and with the unguardedness of spirit his great anger had left in Wilfrid, there was only one answer possible to that question. And it was an answer that did not need to be expressed in words.

---

“Believe in you, darling? I only wish I were able not to believe,—not to think and dream of you every day, every night, ever since I first knew you!”

It was all out before he could stop himself, whispered into her ear with his arm round her neck. How sweet it was to touch her! Wilfrid forgot whether it was wrong, forgot where he was, forgot all his obligations, forgot even the possible presence of coolies, fellow-citizens, servants and all. The only thing he was conscious of was that the lips he was kissing were Violet's, and that she was as much his own in heart as though they two were free, with the whole wide world and life before them.

---

## CHAPTER VII.

Where indeed was the wrong in it all?

Mrs. Denman had argued the whole matter out to herself, and she could not see where it lay. Conventionally, socially, she admitted, Wilfrid and Violet were very wrong — unjustifiable. But morally, as before that higher tribunal of right and wrong where Mrs. Denman's affections and prejudices sat as judges, the two were absolved.

Mr. Kennedy had a most objectionable wife, an odious woman, who made his life a misery to him. It was unreasonable to expect him to put up with her ways; so he was justified in striking out into a new path for himself. Mrs. Davison had a husband for whom she had never cared a rap, and who was really a wicked old man. She was justified too, so long as the affair did not come to a scandal.

And there was no reason it should. Shanghai is a place where people are so busy with their own concerns that they have very little time left for discussing their neighbours'. That is done by the Chinese servants, undoubtedly; and it might have been edifying to know what Mrs. Davison's *amah* and Mr. Kennedy's *coolie*, who were near relatives, said to each other as they received or forwarded the daily *chits* that passed between

their employers. It probably did not escape the all-noting, though apparently nought-seeing, eye of the gate-keeper at Mr. Davison's *hong* that these *chits* passed in a *chit-case*, from which the paper containing name of the receiver could easily be removed, and not in the tell-tale ordinary correspondence book, wherein letters to such a friend as Mrs. Denman were recorded. But what did it matter, what the Chinese thought or said, so long as the parties concerned knew it not?

Just at first Wilfrid and Violet were careful, and beyond the daily *chits*, confined themselves to chance meetings, and "accidental" coincidences in the matter of choosing the same afternoon to drop in at Mrs. Denman's house for tea. For Mrs. Denman had to be let into their confidence, if only to get her to hold her tongue. And Flossie had sighed, and had shaken her head wisely once or twice, and then had remembered her own two little fluff-haired daughters, and how fond Mr. Kennedy was of children, and how Mrs. Kennedy hated them. What this remembrance had to do with the case in point it is impossible to explain, but it sufficed for Mrs. Denman.

But, as the weeks passed away, and the winter gradually grew to an end, *chits* and chance meetings were voted "not good enough." The days on which those chance meetings came off were good enough certainly; but those days on which the two did not meet were quite too bad. These were the days when Wilfrid discovered he must take a constitutional, as hard as he could, at a pace which was utterly impossible for Mrs. Kennedy, along some distant road. How was she to know this road was only a few yards off, on the Shanghai Race Course, and that the walk only meant a saunter with Violet on the far side of it, away from the main road? Or how was she to know that everybody in Shanghai knew it—everybody but herself and Mr. Davison?

That Wilfrid had deserted her, that he no longer went with

her to missionary meetings, that he went to a great many bachelor dinners, and came home very late from the office every day, were of course bitter facts soon forced upon her. And, devoted as she really was to her husband—with an unpleasant enough, selfish devotion it may be, but at any rate with a loyal devotion—, Mrs. Kennedy suffered untold pangs of hopeless jealousy. She was far too proud to complain of Wilfrid's conduct to herself, much less suffer any one else to blame him. When one of her special friends mentioned his name, Mrs. Kennedy would instantly freeze up with an awful frost. She knew, or rather fancied she knew, why she was no longer her husband's all-in-all. And this fancied knowledge was the bitterest drop in her cup. It was because she was childless.

And now, when it was quite too late, she began to try to please her husband. She would not go to balls formerly; she had made herself intensely disagreeable that memorable night at the theatre; now she went everywhere, a good deal to Wilfrid's annoyance. Of course she did not dance, but sat and glared in a corner, looking so stern and forbidding that even good-natured Mr. Denman, when ordered by his wife to take her in to supper, absolutely declined the task. Nor would she have had any supper at all on one particular occasion had not Tom Edwards taken compassion on her, just after Kennedy had finished his eleventh dance with Mrs. Davison.

Mrs. Kennedy had noted the number of dances; had noted the brilliance of youth of her rival; knew quite well, by instinct, how matters stood between these two. But she said not a word, only set her face like a flint, and waited for what time would bring.

As for Wilfrid, he was absolutely, unreasoningly happy. He was living in such a whirl of excitement that he had no time for remorse. They were worked very hard in the Shanghai Custom House; they went early and came away late. Every

spare moment he had was filled up with Violet—either seeing her, writing to her, reading *chits* from her, or planning their next meeting. Besides, one could be very gay in Shanghai. There were many clubs for all kinds of objects, and to most of these many Wilfrid belonged. He had given up the idea of saving, and was spending money recklessly though not viciously. In fact, his pace grew quite alarming to his best friends, and about a month or so after the Spring Races, to which Mrs. Kennedy could not bring herself to go, Mr. Denman was moved to speak quite seriously about Wilfrid to Flossie.

“Kennedy will be going to the dogs soon, if he doesn’t take care,” he said. “Can’t you get Mrs. Davison to influence him a little? He really will be in serious trouble before long.”

“Does he drink?” Flossie asked anxiously.

“No; at least not in the way young Edwards does. But still, I should fancy his head is not very strong. And he’s acting like a fool too, in a way that’s sure to get him into trouble. But he has the devil’s own luck, all the same, little as he deserves it! Fancy, Flossie, last week a Chinaman came into the office selling Manila Lottery tickets. I took one for you, dear, but it was a blank, as usual! But Kennedy! He hummed and hawed over the concern, couldn’t make up his mind, finally got the man to write down the numbers of two he fancied, and made him promise to bring them back in the afternoon, if he had them still. Actually, Kennedy couldn’t decide which ticket he should take without ‘having been home first,’ as he put it. We all knew precious well it wasn’t Mrs. Kennedy he was going to consult! All the youngsters were tittering, naturally. But here comes in his extraordinary luck. He came back after tiffin with the number settled, I presume. The Chinaman turned up again, and hadn’t sold that identical ticket, the only one left. And to day we hear—what? Kennedy has won no less than twenty thousand dollars!! Did you ever hear the like? ‘Don’t tell my missus!’ he said, and



off he went to Mrs. Davison's, in the middle of the day, not caring a jot for the passers-by. And this afternoon,—out in a high gig, driving Mrs. Davison! Foolish! mad! ridiculous!”

And Mr. Denman flung himself into a rocking-chair, and noisily clattered his heels together, to signify his vexation.

As for Mrs. Denman, her vexation at the imprudence of the afternoon's drive quite took away her satisfaction at the lucky lottery ticket. But what use was it to remonstrate with Violet, to tell her to make Wilfrid Kennedy more careful? She had done so over and over again, and what had been the result?

“I love him, Flossie, just as he is; and I don't want him altered in the least. He only goes in for all these excitements because he can't get me. So do I; and I can't blame him for what I do myself!”

But these were explanations Mrs. Denman was not at liberty to give her husband. And, as she was a trifle superstitious, she could not help looking on this fresh stroke of luck to Wilfrid as a sign that after all Providence was on the lovers' side.

---

---

PART III.

---

## CHAPTER I.

"There is a bundle of despatches down from Peking this morning. Marching orders for some of us, I guess. I wonder who is to go? Scarcely you, Kennedy, you've only been here nine months. Wonder if I'm the unlucky mortal?"

Tom Edwards leaned over Kennedy's desk to impart the news. Wilfrid was late that morning, and had been obliged to enter himself accordingly. And now he had to make up for lost time, and he was due at Mrs. Denman's for tiffin, and here was that idiot Edwards gassing away to him!

"A move may mean a promotion, though," Edwards went on. "I shouldn't object to an extra twenty-five taels a month. I've not found my heiress yet, you see! Nor have I got some one to pick me out the winning number in the Manila Lottery!"

This was intended for a dig, and might have had the effect desired on Wilfrid had not the *ting-ch'ai* attached to the Commissioner's office made his appearance at that moment.

"Mr. Kennedy, Commissioner talky you come topside."

And Wilfrid got up at once and went, leaving Tom Edwards much disturbed in mind.

"Is Kennedy going to be moved?" he asked, appealing to the whole office. "He's a favourite at headquarters, I've more

than suspected for a long time. But it will be a beastly shame if he's jockeyed over our heads!"

"You had better not be in quite such a hurry about Kennedy's promotion," one of the Assistants remarked. "May be it is only intended for his good, to put him out of danger, this transfer you make so sure of. Perhaps Mrs. Kennedy's health demands a change!"

Then they all laughed, till the chief Assistant called for order, and pointed to five or six clerks belonging to different honges, who had been waiting the officials' leisure for the last ten minutes.

Every one was busy when Wilfrid came back into the office, but every one found time to whisper the same question to him as he passed to his own place—

"Promotion?"

"No. Taiwan-fu."

Then he sat down to his work, and waited for them to come to condole with him.

He wanted their sympathy, anybody's sympathy, badly! The blow which he had known was bound to fall had fallen, but alas! how much too soon. It did not so much matter to him that Fate was decreeing his exile in distant Formosa, where everything would be against him—climate, want of society, all the *et ceteras* that made up the pleasantnesses of life in the outports on the mainland of China. Wilfrid had been in ports quite as unhealthy, quite as solitary, before. But those had been the days when he had never met Violet, when he was heart and hand free. To him at the present moment it seemed life must come to an end, that he must die a physical death, or become a raving maniac, if the hope of seeing Violet was taken from him. Surely the Fates allowed him little enough now—only a few short hours in the course of the week. He could not do with less, he could not do without her at all! To get up in the morning and wish

it were night; to lie dreaming of her by night, and long for the morning; without hope, in a port where mails were months old before you got them;—the situation was impossible!

And how glad Mrs. Kennedy would be to hear the news! Why, it was only the evening before that she had said she wanted to get away from Shanghai, that she might have the chance of seeing him, Wilfrid, “occasionally,” in an outport! Had she been working for this end? Had she got this wish carried up to Peking? The Thomsons had gone up there lately, and Mrs. Thomson had been a good deal with Mrs. Kennedy, and had used her brougham freely. Was this the *quid pro quo*?

Wilfrid was not naturally of a suspicious nature; but his wife’s words the previous evening had grated on his ear, and they came back uncomfortably now. He felt he could not tell her face to face of this disaster, and see her look of “thankful” triumph. He wrote the news on a slip of paper, and sent it to her by an office-coolie. She would have worn off her first joy by the time he saw her next.

It was otherwise with Violet. He must see her and tell her himself, lest the shock of hearing from an outsider might betray her. So he wrote her also a *chit*, bidding her wait for him in the Cemetery on her way to Mrs. Denman’s tiffin.

And then to work, to try to shut out that horrible, blank future before him. An endless future, without one ray of hope in it! And he had been going to do such great things, if only he had been allowed to stay on in Shanghai. First, he had been going to pay off all his debts. Violet herself had undertaken to be his banker, and had taken possession, as a preliminary, of his just-won dollars. What was the use of being lucky now? What good would his money do him in Taiwan-fu? What use was it even to be alive there?

And then came back to him a few words, lightly spoken,

which had been amongst those offered to him for consolation by his fellow-Assistants that morning—

“If I had just won a big prize in the Manila Lottery, I would see the I.G. at Jericho before I would go to Formosa!”

Wilfrid got up, put on his hat, and walked straight out of the office, the minute the clock struck twelve. He had made up his mind to see the I.G. at Jericho.

---

## CHAPTER II.

It was a heavy, still, and oppressive day, the one following that on which Wilfrid Kennedy received his orders for Taiwan-fu. Not a breath of air was stirring; even the "scissor-grinders," those insufferable cicadas, were mute. The mosquitoes, however, were in full swing, and in a vicious humour. For the "damp days" of the early Shanghai summer were drawing to a close, and the real heat was just about to begin.

Mr. Davison had had a restless night, and was feeling very unwell that morning. The hot weather did not suit him at all, and a breakfast was an impossibility. He got into his office about ten o'clock, and ordered a pick-me-up. For this would be a busy day for him. He was owner of one of the lines of steamers running between Shanghai and the coast ports, and to-day his finest and newest steamer, which had just made her maiden trip to the Far East, was to clear for Hongkong. Indeed, as Mr. Davison came into the office by one door the captain of the *Corea* entered by the other.

"Going out, Harvey?" Mr. Davison asked graciously. "Wish I were going with you! It would do me all the good in the world to get a blow. This place is positively stifling to-day!"

So it was. Great drops of perspiration were trickling down

Mr. Davison's neck, and standing on the unsteady hand that reached out for his glass.

"That was just what I came to ask you about, sir," the skipper answered. "The glass is going down steadily, and a typhoon is coming up, just as surely as God made little apples. By your leave and with your consent, Mr. Davison, I won't take the *Corea* out in such weather as this. I'll stay in till the blow is over. I'm an old hand on this coast, and I can tell pretty surely what's going to happen. And I'd rather not run the risk with a new ship, or indeed any ship at all. Put her off twenty-four hours, please, sir."

"Till the blow has begun, you had better say!" sneered Mr. Davison. "I just wish it *would* blow, and freshen us up a bit! You're always croaking about 'blows,' Harvey. Perpetually crying 'wolf!' I don't care if it does blow. I don't mean to have the *Corea* lying here eating her head off. Here are all your papers ready, cargo finished, everything done.—What do you mean by coming croaking here now, sir!"

Mr. Davison's temper was very short at the best of times, and this was not even a good time. And his worst manner was always reserved for his skippers, and more especially for Captain Harvey, who had a disagreeable habit of speaking out his own mind, as on this occasion.

His reply in the present instance was:—

"My opinion is, Mr. Davison, that it's not fit weather to take a ship out in, and that if we go we risk the lives of the crew."

"You are afraid of going, then?" Mr. Davison enquired sarcastically. "Come, come, you must have better reason for staying in port than a typhoon due next week. Why, there's the *Chanticleer*,—rotten, crazy old tub that she is,—*her* captain didn't think twice of taking her out this morning. She passed by a couple of hours and more ago. Won't the Hongkong men laugh when they hear we let ourselves be beaten by her!"

"The *Chanticleer* has gone out, do you mean to say? Well, her skipper must have taken leave of his seven senses! Gone out?—are you sure she's gone out?" Captain Harvey continued in a more doubtful tone. "I didn't see her, at any rate."

"No, you were probably asleep," Mr. Davison said drily. "But you can take my word for it; and that she'll be in Hongkong twenty-four hours before you, though you go twelve knots, and she can only make nine!"

And he turned his back on the strong-minded skipper, and sat down at his desk as though Harvey were already gone.

But the old sea-dog did not go. Mr. Davison had touched him just between the joints of his harness, in that tender place where he could be hurt. There was one thing Joseph Harvey could not bear, and that was being beaten, even by one admittedly his inferior. A storm was coming sure enough; of that he was positive, and the time of year warned him that it might be a dangerous one. There were no weather signals or storm reports in China in those days, but a man of his experience did not need them. He had come with the intention of refusing to take his ship out; he would willingly have paid out of his own pocket any expenses that might be incurred by the delay; but all his convictions were shaken by that wretched *Chanticleer*, sailing to crow over him in Hongkong.

"Mr. Davison."

A good five minutes had elapsed since the *taipan* had subsided into his chair and correspondence. Mr. Davison was perfectly aware that Captain Harvey was still in the room, and had a pretty shrewd guess at what was passing in the skipper's mind. But he snarled out:—

"What, are you there still? Why don't you get aboard and to sleep before the storm comes?"

"No joking, please," the captain answered angrily. "I've made up my mind to go out, and I'll do so in another hour. But,



Mr. Davison, I wish you to remember that I've given it as my opinion that we are running a great risk."

"Oh, you've changed your mind, have you?" Mr. Davison answered lightly. "I'll take the responsibility, and the *kudos* too if you like, so long as you get into Hongkong before the *Chanticleer*!"

\* \* \* \* \*

"Harvey's an old croaker," Mr. Davison said to his chief cashier, who came into the room not long after the skipper had left it. "He funks going out when there's a puff of wind; he funks going out when there isn't. I have a fight with him every time. Made me quite hot just now! And I'm sure one doesn't need to be *made* hot on such a day as this. Don't let any one disturb me this morning, Brown. I'm very busy."

"Very sorry, Mr. Davison, but there's a lady here, a Mrs. Kennedy, who says she must see you directly."

"Mrs. Kennedy? Who is Mrs. Kennedy? I can't see any one. Tell her so, Brown, and give her five dollars if she wants them."

"She's a lady, sir. Her husband is Assistant in the Customs. I think you had better see her."

It was lucky Mr. Davison was not looking up, and so did not see the peculiar smile that played round Mr. Brown's carefully cultivated moustache.

"Shew her in then, Brown. Boy, take away this glass."

Mr. Davison got up, smoothed his few remaining locks before a glass, and drew forward an armchair for his visitor. Mrs. Kennedy, Mrs. Kennedy,—he seemed to remember the name. Where had he heard it, where had he seen it? Oh yes, in a *chit*-book lately, Mrs. Davison's *chit*-book, brought by mistake to him. Still, it was strange that Mrs. Kennedy should come to see him instead of his wife. Probably she had come in at the wrong door, and that fool Brown—

Mrs. Kennedy was standing before him now. A plain, not too young lady, in a drab cotton gown and a large garden hat, tied under the chin with ribbons.

"Mr. Davison," she said ; and at the sound of her voice the mighty *taipan* gave a start. It was so hollow, and seemed to come from her boots. "Read this !"

And she handed him a sheet of paper.

Mr. Davison could not read without glasses, and it took him some time to find them. When he had done so, he read the paper, which ran as follows :—

*"My dear Louisa,*

*I find it will be impossible for me to go to Taiwan-fu with you. I have deceived you for a long time, but I will deceive you no longer. I am going away, where you will never find me nor hear of me again. I beg of you to go back to Bath, and forget you have ever known me. Would to God for your sake you never had !* [There was a big blot here, as if some words had been written and scratched out.]

*W. K."*

Mr. Davison read the letter, folded it up carefully, and returned it to the owner.

"Well ?" that lady asked anxiously.

"Do you want any opinion on that letter?" Mr. Davison enquired in a puzzled manner. "If so, you had better consult a lawyer. For myself, I scarcely understand why you have shewn it to me. I neither know who the writer is, nor to whom it is addressed, nor what it means. Have you not mistaken the house, my dear madam ?"

And he turned to the bell, and laid hold of the rope. The woman must clearly be either mad or drunk.

"Mistaken ? I only wish I had mistaken the house ! I hoped I was altogether mistaken, till I went to your private house, and found that your wife had eloped with my husband !"

Mr. Davison's hand fell from the bell-rope ; his jaw fell, his face turned livid. It was a dangerous moment for a stout man on such a sultry day. He staggered to the chair he had placed ready for his visitor, and sat down on it, perfectly unable to speak for a moment.

Mrs. Kennedy looked round the room. The door into the outer office was standing ajar, and indiscreet ears might be within hearing. She closed the door and locked it.

"Mr. Davison," she said, lowering her voice to an awesome whisper, "this business has been going on for a long time. I have known of it for many months. But I never thought it would come to this!"

And here Mrs. Kennedy, actually for the first time in her married life, broke down, and covered her face with her hands.

That moment's pause gave Mr. Davison time to recover. He sat up straight and addressed her in his own peculiar style.

"You are labouring under a delusion, Mrs.—ahem! Mrs. Davison cannot have anything to do with this very lamentable business. She is in her own apartment, as I can easily prove to you."

And he rose again to ring the bell.

"It is of no use your ringing," Mrs. Kennedy cried, hastily drying her eyes. "The servants can't tell you anything, or they won't. But Mrs. Davison is not in her room. I've just come from there. Ask your *boy* if she hasn't gone out!"

But this Mr. Davison would not do, naturally. He walked out of the office, upstairs, and into Violet's boudoir himself.

No, she was not there. Her *amah* was, however, and busily engaged in tidying (and ransacking) a drawer filled with handkerchiefs—an article against which no Chinaman or Chinawoman is proof.

Missisy have go outside. What time go? No savvy. Little time come back? No savvy; no have talkey. Missisy

one piecey man go? No savvey. Go carriage? No savvey. "No savvey" was the only answer Mr. Davison, now slightly disquieted, got from the *amah*.

The *boy* was nearly equally discreet. The only information Mr. Davison gathered from him was that Mrs. Davison had gone out very early, before seven o'clock, and had got into a *jin-ricksha* just outside the gate.

This in itself was a strange circumstance, and increased Mr. Davison's discomfort and displeasure. It was a most undignified thing for his wife to have done. Indeed, he felt exceedingly uncomfortable by the time he again faced Mrs. Kennedy, who was standing bolt upright just where he had left her.

"Mrs. Davison is not at home," he said stiffly. "But I have no doubt she will come in shortly. Will you call again?"

He settled himself once more at his desk, with as unconcerned an air as he could assume. Mrs. Kennedy hesitated a moment. Then she said, having first closed the door, which Mr. Davison had again left open:—

"I don't think you quite understand me, Mr. Davison. I have the most positive proof, furnished by one who saw them on board, that my husband and your wife have gone off on the *Chanticleer* this morning. What do you propose to do?"

Mrs. Kennedy had been born to command, and she had commanded all her life. Mr. Davison felt and recognised her power now. It was in a voice his inferiors did not know that he answered:—

"I do not know. I am too confused to know. Are you sure that you are right?"

It was pitiable to see him now, so fallen from his own self-estimation. They were truly partners in misfortune, and Mrs. Kennedy's fellow-feeling actually made her kindly towards this "evil liver." Her voice was comparatively soft as she said:—

"I have made up my mind what I shall do, Mr. Davison, and I think you had better do the same. I could not bear to be pitied by the people here, nor to receive their sympathy. I want nothing from anybody. But I shall insist on my rights. My husband cannot, and shall not, desert me like this. I have legal claims upon him. I am going to follow him at once and bring him back. You had better do the same."

"Do the same, madam? It is quite impossible for me, quite impossible, granting even that your story is correct, which——"

"Very well then, stay and have the finger of scorn pointed at you. I will not, at any rate. I am going to Hongkong to-day, if I can find a steamer going. I will not sit quiet and be wronged. But I will beg of you, Mr. Davison, not to repeat any of our conversation. I hope no one in Shanghai will know of this business till it is all over. Good-bye."

And Mrs. Kennedy stalked out of the office, carefully leaving the door open.

Mr. Davison lay back in his chair, and mopped his forehead. Through the half-open door sounds of suppressed tittering came to his ears. The young men were making merry over his strange visitor. Was it possible they would make merry over him too, over the old fool who couldn't take care of his young wife? Why hadn't he looked after her better? How was it he had neglected her doings so entirely? Of course she didn't care for him, he had always known that; but that had never seemed a matter of importance to him. He had married her in the way of business, and the marriage had not brought any credit on the *hong*. His wife had been a bad investment, in short. But how would this matter strike the Shanghai world to-day? His friends, how would they receive the news? How they would suddenly stop their whispering when he came into the Club that evening! How his intimate old cronies would venture on a word of sympathy! Sympathy with *him*! No, that was intolerable; and this woman,

---

this Mrs. Kennedy, was right in running away from it. He would do so also ; and though he might never take Violet back, at any rate none of his old acquaintances should have the chance of sneering at him. After all, it might all be a lie, but if it were not he was too old to be fooled by a girl now !

And so it came to pass that just as the *Corea*, with Mrs. Kennedy on board, was about to cast off from the wharf, Mr. Davison's brougham hastily drove up, and the *taipan* himself stepped on the deck, and told the skipper he too was going to Hongkong.

---

## CHAPTER III.

The *Chanticleer* was well outside the river by evening. For the last time in her life, so Violet hoped, she had looked on those Woosung forts. It was stiflingly hot still, but the captain promised a blow beyond Gutzlaff, at the mouth of the Yangtze. And there on the deck Wilfrid and Violet had sat, and had watched the land gradually disappear,—that ugly brown muddy shore where Violet had suffered so much. The *Chanticleer* was not a fast boat ; she was scarcely a passenger-boat at all, and it took a long time to get down to Gutzlaff. But even that was passed now, and they were really outside, beyond the dirty yellow water at the mouth of the Yangtze, with their faces turned to Hongkong.

How utterly delightful it was, in spite of the ill-kept ship, the stuffy cabins, and the rickety deck-chairs ! There the two sat, and planned out their new life, calculated their resources, went over their perils, and ended each gloomy suggestion by a grasp of each other's hand and a look in each other's eyes. They were in no hurry to kiss each other now ; they would have all their lifetime to kiss in. Indeed, they scarcely felt themselves lovers any more ; they were simply husband and wife. The past was altogether a dead past, but a past too present for them to realise any remorse for it as yet.

But all the time, as they sailed on and on, though they knew it not, the pursuers came after them and gained on them.

Violet was tired and went early to bed. The evening was, if possible, still more sultry than the morning, and the night was worse than the evening. Wilfrid could not sleep. A mosquito had got into his cabin and kept singing just above his ear. When he closed his eyes, a sort of spectre seemed to stalk in, with his wife's hat, his mother's eyes, and Violet's features. He tried to smoke, but it was of no use. The matches were damp, and when at last he lighted his cigarette, it burnt down on one side, and only stained his fingers. He got up and went out on deck.

It was early yet, for the bells had only just gone half-past eleven. Very still too was the air, for he fancied he could hear the bells of another vessel, which was apparently overhauling them,—a vessel whose lights his long-sighted eyes could scarcely make out. Wilfrid walked along the deck, and began to climb up on to the bridge to catch a better sight of her.

And then a strange thing happened. The night, as has just been said, had been still with a stillness perfectly oppressive. But as Wilfrid laid his hand on the railing of the ladder that led up to the bridge, there came, as it seemed round an island straight ahead—a sharp pointed rock whereon never foot had trod—a sudden cold gust of wind. It came so suddenly and so sharply that it nearly lifted Wilfrid off his feet. And it swept along the deck, and carried across to the bulwarks those two deck chairs on which Violet and he had sat. Then the gust passed further along, towards that other distant vessel.

Jamming his cap on his head, Wilfrid climbed on to the bridge. The captain was pacing it alone and did not notice him. Kennedy stood still and looked around.

Truly the night was ghostly, awesome, up here! The moon, which had been trying to shine through a film as of heat when Wilfrid went to bed, had now gone in behind a thick bank of



cloud, and a heavy pall seemed to hang from the sky and lose itself in the ocean behind them. Just ahead loomed the black rock, and a little to their left, like phantom ships, the great masts of two Foochow pole-junks straggled up into the air. And in the far distance, from that dark south towards which they were steering, came a muttering sound as of distant thunder. Wilfrid looked behind for the lights of the other steamer. They had disappeared in the haze.

"A storm is coming up," Wilfrid thought, "and quickly too." Even as he thought there came another gust, chiller than the last, not from round the island, but across from the coast. Sheer across them it came, and the boats on the starboard side gave an ominous creak. And at this gust the skipper turned sharply round and disappeared into the chartroom.

As the captain went into the chartroom the chief officer's head appeared upon the ladder.

"You up, Mr. Kennedy? I should think you'd better get below. It's going to blow."

It had began to do so already. The weather had changed rapidly within the last ten minutes. The puffs of wind were coming faster and faster, and the sky had grown black all over. No sign now even of the great rock they were just then passing; and the junk masts were rocking and swaying to and fro. Rocking and groaning too, as only Chinese masts can groan. And the sound of men hauling down a sail came to the ears of the two on the bridge as though through cotton wool.

"How's the glass, skipper?"

"Falling, sir, falling steadily. It's going to be a dirty night."

"Look there!" the chief officer suddenly said, pointing in the direction of the nearest junk.

Through the growing, oppressive darkness Wilfrid peered down towards the water. From the junk's side there was floating

away, floating towards them, a little white paper junk, the very copy of the great ship itself.

"The Chinese think a typhoon is coming. They always send out a boat like that in typhoon weather. That's for Joss to sink instead of themselves!"

The officer laughed, and passed into the chartroom. But Wilfrid felt a shiver of something like fear creep up his back. If the officer had outgrown superstition, Wilfrid Kennedy had not.

But he had no time left for fear. The sea, now that they were beyond the shelter of the island, was no longer the oily mill-pond it had been. Great and angry waves were rising, and the wind was rising too. Nearer and nearer the great storm swept, faster and faster it came on them. Now it was as though great guns were cannonading somewhere close at hand, now as though the sound of sharp volleys of artillery came borne towards them. And then the *Chanticleer* began to rock, the boats on the davits creaked, and faintly, very faintly, through the fast gathering storm came the sound of eight bells from the deck below.

"Go below, Mr. Kennedy, and stay there. We are going to batten down everything," came the orders from the captain.

"Wilfrid, where are you?"

Violet, nearly blown away, was clinging to the lowest step of the bridge as he came down.

"Darling, why did you not stay in your cabin? It is not safe for you out here."

Scarcely safe for him either, as matters then stood. For at that moment a great wave broke over the deck, and carried over the bulwarks, a very little way from them, the two deck chairs. Then the *Chanticleer* righted herself and plunged forward into the black night.

"Oh Wilfrid, what *is* happening? We are running down a junk!"

Close by them, right ahead, sounded an awful, terror-

carrying shriek. Heedless of the danger, Wilfrid and Violet staggered towards the bulwarks. And there, bearing down on them, filled with men and women shrieking for their lives, they saw a large fishing boat. Right on their bows she came, and death for all her crew seemed inevitable, when—she suddenly turned at a sharp angle, “kept away,” and grazed past them at half-a-yard’s length.

Just above their heads they could hear the skipper hurling anathemas on these reckless fishermen, and then the *Chanticleer*’s whistle sounded for an instant. There was an instant’s lull; the next moment came a crash, as the wind caught one of the boats on the port side, and lifted her clean off the davits.

“Look out for yourself, Mr. Kennedy! Excuse me, Mrs. Davison!”

The skipper had gripped Violet’s arm, only just in time to prevent her from falling. The *Chanticleer* was rolling and pitching, and wave after wave came splashing over the low bulwarks. In a moment Violet felt herself lifted off her feet and carried in two strong arms, not Wilfrid’s, into a place of safety, into the captain’s own cabin, which adjoined the deck-house.

“You can stay here if you like,” he said. “You’ll find it less stuffy than down below, and I can look after you better. Would you like Mr. Kennedy to come?”

He was a kind-hearted old salt, with a very weak spot for a pretty face. And one of his officers had just been telling him why these two passengers were on board,—that is, the “why” as commonly reported in Shanghai. And that “why” it was which had brought him off the bridge, and made him offer his cabin, and, when he went back to the chartroom, give special instructions to the third officer to get Mrs. Davison anything she might happen to want.

“The blow will be over soon,” the skipper told Violet cheerfully. “Looks like the tail-end of a typhoon, did you say

Mr. Kennedy? Oh no! nothing so bad as that! Only, as you see, Mrs. Davison, we always take precautions!"

And then he shut the cabin door, bidding Wilfrid lock it, "in case the water should get in"—and that was the last they saw of him.

Inside, out of the chilly storm air, the cabin seemed stuffy, almost stifling. The little oil lamp smelt far more than it enlightened, and swayed to and fro with the rolling, pitching vessel. Outside the window all was black darkness, save when every now and then a lantern flickered past them as one of the crew, slipping and sliding about, passed to some duty. No officer came near them. Nothing reached them from beyond the cabin but the mighty splashing of the waves, as they broke again and again over the deck, while the wind howled and roared on every side, whistled shrill through the rigging, boomed from the bridge, moaned from the land, and rushed away, shrieking, over the great ocean to some distant land.

Crash! crash! they could hear the crockery smashing in the pantry and saloon just below them. The cargo was shifting too; there was the dull thud of heavy bales knocking against each other. Splash, came the water against the cabin window, splash, splash, again and again. Only the very strongest of glasses could have stood the shock. The lamp, which had begun to sputter, suddenly gave out, and died away into a sickening stench. Then it went out altogether, and Wilfrid and Violet were left alone in the darkness. But still the *Chanticleer* kept on her way, and once, when there came an instant's lull in the howling storm, they fancied they heard the captain's voice shouting orders from the bridge.

But that was the last lull. The bells had stopped chiming; time had come to an end for that night on the *Chanticleer*. Rattle, rattle went the screw, the waves knocked louder than ever for admission, and Wilfrid and Violet, no longer able to

sit on the little seat near the door, crouched down together on the floor, holding tight to each other.

Now the pumps were at work; they could distinguish the sound of them through the din. The engines were going too, for the *Chanticleer* was still holding her own. The night was wearing away, or soon should be. For one instant a grey streak flitted across the sky, and then came a new sound from a new quarter. Rain. Right over them it swept, a furious driving scud, and lashed their roof like a shower of bullets.

"The storm will be over soon, darling. See, the rain has come!"

But even as Wilfrid spoke, the wind gave a fresh howl, and suddenly struck the *Chanticleer* full on the port side. For an instant there sounded the rattle of the screw, and then there ran a mighty shiver through the vessel, followed by a long sharp crack. A terrific roar went up from a group of sailors who must have been crouching close by. There was a general rush backwards, and Wilfrid, peering out through the window, saw a frightful black iron monster dashing from right to left on the deck, scattering destruction with every swoop.

"Violet, you heard that noise. It was the steering-gear which broke. We're done for now; the ship is unmanageable. Oh, why did I bring you to die like this! Violet, darling, forgive me, tell me you do!"

Wilfrid's arm was round her; his eyes tried in vain to see her through the awful darkness. Was she going to faint, or to shrink away from him now? There was one moment's agonising pause, and then Violet had whispered in his ear:—

"Death with you is easy, Wilfrid. Only hold me tight all the time. Promise you won't let me go!"

\* \* \* \* \*

The *Chanticleer* staggered, rolled, and slowly, slowly began to move round, carried by the wind. And all the time that awful

banging and swaying went on quite near to them, while the waves swirled and sucked round the ship, dragging her, like wild beasts, right into the trough of the sea, where they could devour her at leisure.

“Did you hear that Wilfrid? It was a whistle, quite close. We shall be saved!”

Yes, it was a whistle; but one which the poor disabled *Chanticleer* had no time to answer. Looking out of the cabin window it was all black darkness for a minute, and then suddenly a great red Eye flamed in upon them. Something black towered above the *Chanticleer*, a mass loomed through the driving pall of rain. There was a mighty shock, a shock that burst open the cabin door, the noise of crashing timber, the sound of many voices mad with fear, a flare as of fire, and as a pitiless, unreasoning accompaniment, the eternal beat of the waves, the pelt of the rain. All this can only have lasted a moment, but that moment held in it a lifetime of agony. For Wilfrid and Violet distinctly saw, on the deck, not twenty paces from their battered refuge, her whom they both had wronged—Wilfrid’s wife. How she came there, where she could have been standing when the *Corea* and the *Chanticleer* crashed together, they were never to know. Only she was there, even in death to come between them.

Had they time to realise all this, or was death too near for them to feel any of the anguish that life would have had in keeping for them? None can tell. For swift following upon that vision came a great and shining wave, and when it had passed the *Corea* and the *Chanticleer* had both disappeared into that great locker of which no man holds the key.

But to this day no man knows their grave, for not one fragment of the *Corea* nor of the *Chanticleer* has ever been washed ashore. They both went out from port, and disappeared, in that memorable typhoon. Men talked of them, and wondered, and

then forgot. The coast almanacks alone keep their memory green.

Nor will Mrs. Denman ever know whether Violet and Wilfrid repented of their deed, nor even if Mr. Davison and Mrs. Kennedy had found them. But this one thing she is sure of in her inmost heart, though she is but a "giggling goose," that if they two, Wilfrid and Violet, could only arise from the dead and tell her what they feel, it would be that they are satisfied.



**No. 4.**

# ***PLAYING PROVIDENCE***

***A CHINA COAST TALE***

BY

LISE BOEHM.

. . . . . “ *Not my pain,  
My pain was nothing : oh your poor poor love,  
Your broken love !* ”





# *PLAYING PROVIDENCE.*

---

## CHAPTER I.

This is how Mr. Smith, clerk in the Customs at Kelung, some thirty miles from the Customs' headquarters at Hôbé, North Formosa, came to be in Hôbé for the space of some six weeks; and how the Commissioner's wife, Mrs. Bridget Delane, came to be mixed up in the story of his life, with the results to be set forth hereafter.

For three whole months, ever since Mrs. Delane, in the person of her husband, newly appointed Commissioner of Customs, had taken over charge of the port, there had been one thorn in her side, one pebble in her shoe, one crease in the smooth page of her life. She had, as was her wont, found out, sought out, wormed out, ordered out, every little private detail, every aspect of family or of bachelor life; each dead, or alive and secretly-cherished, love-story. In short, she knew every single circumstance, trivial or important, about every single mortal in Hôbé, Twatutia, and Kelung, the three settlements which, up to the time when Formosa was ceded to Japan, made up the Treaty Port of Tamsui. True or false, wrung out or volunteered, the secrets of every individual, the skeletons in the cupboards, the family jars, the temporary estrangements,—none of these had escaped her. Only in one case had she been baffled, and that was concerning this same man Smith.

And now her enemy was delivered into her hand, delivered by the merest fluke, by a veritable dispensation of Providence ! For he had gone down with an unaccountably violent attack of malarial fever, away in distant Kelung, just when the only doctor's services were required in the other two settlements. At the beginning of summer this was, when the freshly turned-up earth reeks of malaria, and the death-rate per diem among the Chinese soldiery is steadily mounting up to its maximum. So Dr. Eugen Gregorius, not being able to be in two places at one and the same time, had requisitioned the Customs' rapid-boat, and had brought his patient with him back to Hôbé.

Who indeed was this Smith ? Mrs. Bridget had before this vainly enquired of every available person, from her husband down to her chair-coolie. No one knew, or at any rate every one professed not to know. Dr. Gregorius, who united to his professional knowledge a vast amount of information about every one else, which information he was always perfectly ready to impart, solemnly swore he had never heard Mr. Smith give a clue as to what he was, had been, had come from, or where he expected to go to. Smith—C. was his initial—had come over to Formosa in the days of the late Commissioner, with his appointment as clerk in the Customs in a carpet bag, which literally contained nothing besides but a sponge and a toothbrush. He had asked to be sent to Kelung, or rather his appointment contained a clause stationing him there. He had not registered as a British subject, though they were all of them, Gregorius himself included, certain that he was an Englishman, by reason of the aforesaid toothbrush. But then the Consul always laughed at registration, and was lax, terribly lax ! Would the Imperial German Vice-Consul in Amoy were a quarter as lax ! This British Consul actually allowed Mr. Smith to do as he liked ! Invited him certainly to dinner once, but only laughed when a curt refusal was sent back. And so——

But here Mrs. Delane's anger had got the better of her, and she had broken in, vowing that this state of affairs should not last, and that she herself would investigate what was probably a most shocking scandal.

Yet three months had passed since that day, and the Commissioner's wife was no "farrarder!" True, she had carefully examined the mail-bags, but no letter had she found addressed to Mr. Smith. Nor had the Consulate letter-coolie, who, with a New Year dollar in view, brought all his packages of correspondence for her to inspect, ever got a letter for or from Kelung. Mrs. Delane actually began to grow thin under the mental torment which this mystery gave her. She ceased to take any interest in the squabbles of the servants at the Junior Customs' Mess, and forgot to insist that the unfortunate infants of the tidewaiters should take special concoctions, or wear extraordinary garments manufactured by herself. Her hair began to fall out; her appetite to fail; her unfortunate spouse to be deprived of his night's rest. And all because of Mr. Smith of Kelung.

"May I come and see him?" she asked eagerly, when Dr. Gregorius, as was his fashion, came in with the tea-things to report affairs in general.

The doctor's round face grew long, and he looked blankly uncomfortable.

"Oh no, my dear Mrs. Delane, by no means. Why, he is very ill, and the excitement caused by the presence of any stranger might prove fatal to him. In a few days, in a few days," he added consolingly.

But Mrs. Bridget scouted the compromise.

"I have been trained as a hospital nurse, Dr. Gregorius, so I am just the person who ought to go," she snapped out. "You are trying to keep me away from him; but you are wrong. A woman always makes the best nurse, so I am going!"

"No, no, you must not go," cried the unfortunate doctor.

Mrs. Delane at a patient's bedside meant an alarming rise in temperature in any case, and in this particular case might mean something far more serious. "You must not go; the fever is infectious!"

Now this was a lie, and Gregorius knew it. But lies are justifiable where doctors are concerned, and this one, boldly spoken, was a telling lie. Mrs. Delane was an abject coward as regarded infection.

"Then I must wait," she said in a tone of vexation. "There, Dr. Gregorius, take your tea. You had better not sit too near me if there is an infectious disease in your house. Why, indeed, do you have him in your house? Why don't you put him into the Mission hospital? If he is so ill, he won't mind, or know, that he is amongst Chinamen. Shall I send my chair-coolies down to move him now? No? I think you are very wrong doctor, to keep him and risk all our lives!"

And for that one sorry lie Dr. Gregorius was obliged to listen for half-an-hour to an exhortation on the duty and manner of disinfecting, was obliged to refuse half-a-dozen remedies for himself and his patient, and had to parry some half hundred skilfully introduced hints as to information concerning Mr. Smith which might have fallen from the sick man in his delirium. For Mrs. Delane was a firm believer in the possibility of surprising secrets out of a delirious person.

"I truly have to work hard for my dinner," said Eugen Gregorius to himself as he went down to his own house that evening. "And after all, the dinner was not worth the eating. And the wine was corked, execrably corked!"

---

## CHAPTER II.

Fifteen years of Formosa, and some twenty-five of China, had rotted away many of the good qualities with which Eugen Gregorius had started in life. The general demoralisation of the foreigners around him, caused in part by a deadly climate, in part by want of occupation, in part by too much ready money easily available, had slowly but surely affected even the sturdy Teuton. By dint of much fever he had almost become fever-proof; by dint of hard drinking—not excessive but steady imbibing—he had become callous to suffering in himself or in others; by dint of losing his friends, or by being forgotten of them, he had become hard-hearted, with no pleasures in life but mere animal pleasures,—good food, and a good bed, and with no horizon beyond the very day he was then living.

It had not been altogether Formosa that had made him thus. There was a certain false-hearted *Luischen*, whose photograph had long since faded into a few yellow streaks, who had in the first place been responsible for the damage done,—a *Luischen* who was now a stout, double-chinned *Frau*, the mother of fourteen, and of twins innumerable! But Gregorius had never known her as *Frau*; she was to him still the “*gnädiges Fräulein*” of his beer and long pipe days,—days gone and quite forgotten now, or

only remembered lately, when the coarsely inquisitive hand of Mrs. Delane had sought to unlock his most innermost chamber.

At any rate, sentiment or not (for sentiment dies hard in a Teutonic breast), Dr. Gregorius was determined that Mrs. Delane should leave Smith alone until he was strong enough to fight for himself. But Fate is stronger than determination! Even as the doctor was taking his morning cocktail, just before going in to see his patient, the boy brought him a chit from Twatutia, the tea-settlement twelve miles up the Tamsui river. Fever and sunstroke up there; Gregorius wanted at once. The matter brooked no delay, so after having looked in on Smith, who was tossing about in his sleep, muttering under his breath, and after having ordered Smith's boy on no account to let any one in, and to give certain medicines at certain times, the doctor set off in a native boat, against the tide and against his will, for Twatutia and his fresh patient.

And the hot hours dragged slowly by, and Smith still tossed and moaned. The boy, replete with rice and pickled cabbage, had subsided into a heavy sleep. The sun rose higher and higher, and outside gradually the noisy natives grew quiet. Every one was resting. Even on board the great junks at anchor the sailors had ceased chattering and were lying, drowsy, under the shelter of the piled-up sails. No sound but the splash of oars coming nearer and nearer the little jetty; then the sound of the boathook scraping along the great stones to find a holding-place, and the spell of sleep was broken.

A stout female figure, with a sunhat calculated by its frightfulness and dimensions to strike terror into the hearts of the beholders, toiled slowly along the uneven, baking flags of the jetty, up to the doctor's house. The figure was followed by a diminutive Chinese boy, the grin of a demon widening his already flattened-out nose, who was bearing a basket containing many parcels, each of the ominous empty-jam-tin shape.

It was Mrs. Bridget and her "familiar spirit," her spy in plain language, who had come to look after Dr. Gregorius' patient in Dr. Gregorius' absence.

And a good reason, to her thinking, had she in coming. For, by one of those strange coincidences which often happen in real life, a courier had arrived that very morning from Kelung with a mail from a Spanish vessel that had put into port from Japan. And with the mail had come, and now actually stared her in the face, a letter addressed in a shaky, childish hand to

*Cyril Smith, Esq.,  
Kelung,  
North Formosa.*

To say that Mrs. Delane had turned over, held up to the light, smelt, tried a loose corner, and thoroughly examined the envelope a dozen times, would not be exaggerating. The letter burned in her presence like fire. She could think of nothing else. "Cyril"—then he must be a gentleman. (All Mrs. Delane's hypotheses she invariably assumed at once to be facts: things were, because she thought they might be.) A child's hand—what child? Why a child? Was it a disguised hand? "Hakodate" was the postmark. Did she know anybody in Hakodate? No, not exactly; but the cousin of one of the tidewaiters in Amoy was constable at the British Consulate there. He would know if there were any Smiths in the place. But supposing Smith was an assumed name, how then?

"Doctor have go Twatutia," announced the familiar spirit, who had been stationed on the verandah with a spyglass.

"Have go?" asked Mrs. Delane eagerly. "How fashion you savvey?"

"Doctor-coolie just now have talkey my. Missisy can see boat; just now come Kantow." And the spyglass was handed to Mrs. Delane.



There, sure enough, under the bold cliff called Kantow, halfway to Twatutia, a tiny speck was to be seen creeping on.

"Boy, catchey boat, catchey coolie come. My go doctor house. Chop-chop!"

And bearing the enigma-solving letter, Mrs. Delane had gone.

It was easy enough to get into the sick man's room. The door stood wide open, and though the boy in charge awoke with a start when the Commissioner's wife appeared in the verandah, he did not attempt to oppose her way. The small boy set down the basket inside the bamboo blinds, and betook himself to the house of a neighbouring friend, there to gamble with dominoes for a few *cash* until his mistress should reappear. And Mrs. Bridget, left in possession, and holding tightly the letter in her hands, walked firmly up to the sick man's bed, and opened the mosquito-curtain.

At the noise of the heavy step, Cyril Smith had half come to his senses, and when Mrs. Delane looked down on him he was lying on his back, staring with feverishly bright and anxiously shifting eyes at the inquisitive but kindly face and the portentous sunhat bending over him.

"I am the Commissioner," said Mrs. Bridget in a loud, distinct voice. This was true, the so-called Commissioner being only her shadow. "I have brought you a letter. Would you like me to read it to you?"

The sick man was all alive and alert in an instant. A sudden rush of blood to his head coloured his eyeballs; he opened his parched lips, and a stammering sound, ending in a groan, more than half alarmed Mrs. Delane. Pity, compassion, a faint far-off idea of what was struggling for utterance, almost tempted her to stay her hand. She laid the letter down on the table, and turned to the basket for one of the mysterious tins. It was jammed, and just as she managed to disengage it she heard a flop and a bang close behind her. .

Cyril Smith lay as he had fallen on the floor, face downwards. But in his right hand he grasped tightly, so tightly that with difficulty she managed to take it from him—when with the help of the boy she had got him back into bed—the letter, now with the envelope half wrenched from it, and which had nearly cost the Customs' clerk his life.

Somehow or other that same letter slipped into Mrs. Delane's pocket when she was driven forth by the alarm of the approach of the doctor's boat. And as it had lost its envelope by the time she was halfway home, perhaps it is not astonishing that Bridget Delane knew what was in Cyril Smith's letter by bedtime, and, what is more, had persuaded herself that she had done the right thing and her duty in reading the aforesaid letter.

---

## CHAPTER III.

But this self-complacency was not fated to last long.

What, indeed, is the use of knowing a secret if no one knows that you know it? What is the pleasure of possessing knowledge if you cannot impart it to the ignorant? A piece of knowledge such as this, too, which absolutely must be made use of at once since, as Dr. Gregorius said, Mr. Smith of Kelung was dying, and had been dying, slowly but certainly, ever since that fatal day when he had been called away to Twatutia?

Did Dr. Gregorius know of that visit paid in his absence? Had he, hearing of what had happened from the boy in charge, put two and two together, and fixed the calamitous four on Mrs. Delane's guilty head? If he did know, if he had guessed, or if he had been told, Dr. Gregorius at least never faced Mrs. Delane, nor accused her roundly of being next door to her brother's murderer. For why? A living dog is more to be feared than a dead lion; and though Dr. Gregorius honestly tried his best to keep the lion alive, he did so without any hope of succeeding. And afterwards, when the lion should be dead, the living dog might prove a most unpleasant enemy. For which cowardly sentiments not the doctor, but the Formosan climate, must have been clearly responsible.

But after two days, during which Dr. Gregorius had uniformly treated Mrs. Delane to the most alarming bulletins, the good lady began to fancy that she smelt a rat. Mr. Smith took so long to die that she began to think he might possibly after all be going to survive. At all events, she had leisure now to think over her secret, and to determine how to make use of it. She was bursting with the mystery: but to what purpose? Mr. Delane was away from home, away in Kelung, madly collecting information for a report on coal-mines and gold-washing. And even if he had been in Hôbô, his wife would have hesitated to tell him. The transaction was, well, a trifle too "high-handed" for the little Commissioner's nerves. There was not a single woman in the place whom she trusted sufficiently to take into her confidence. The two or three tidewaiters' wives were "too great gossips,"—Mrs. Delane, of course, never ranked herself in the same category. There remained only one man whose advice she wished to take, that is, one man whom she really wanted to tell, and that was Dr. Gregorius.

Still, how awkward it would be to begin her story! Awkward or not, however, it must be done; and, after all, the telling might not be so hard as in anticipation.

And so it proved. The doctor himself led up to the difficult subject that very evening after dinner, when they were sitting out in the verandah, Mrs. Delane with her legs safely tied up in cotton pillow-cases against the mosquitoes, the doctor smoking one of Mr. Delane's choicest Manilas.

"I wish I knew whether Smith has any relations," Gregorius puffed forth, as though thinking aloud. "It is to me repugnant that he should die like a rat in a hole, and his friends never hear what has become of him. Who knows? he may have a wife, a child, waiting for him; for surely he has not been saving his money so carefully for nothing."

Mrs. Bridget stole a look at the doctor's face. How much

did he know after all? Or was he merely pumping her? She held her breath in tight, and Eugen Gregorius resumed, after a somewhat lengthy pause :

"There has been found, near my jetty, an envelope bearing his name. But no letter inside. Now, how could he have dropped that envelope there? The boy tells me he never left his side while I was at Twatutia, and Smith most certainly had not strength enough to go outside my door. I cannot help thinking that in the envelope we hold the key to Smith's past life, that by it we could find out if there is any one who knows him, any one who cares for him. The I. G. must know, of course, and it may only have been a circular after all," he added, carelessly flicking off his cigar-ash.

"No, it wasn't a circular," Mrs. Bridget broke in, quite too eager to impart her news to notice how she had been "drawn" by her companion. "Why shouldn't it have been from his wife, doctor, whose place, as you rightly say, is by his side?"

It was pitch dark by now, and Mrs. Delane could not see the peculiar smile that curled the doctor's upper lip, bringing into view his huge tobacco-stained teeth.

"The right place—that would depend upon what manner of woman she is. To have left him here by himself, without ever writing to him—I have your word, Mrs. Delane, that no letter for him has ever passed through your hands—"

"Until now," Mrs. Delane interrupted, the irresistible longing to tell mastering all her prudence. "Two days ago a letter came for Mr. Smith. You were away; I had to act on my own responsibility. I could not wait for you; I carried it down, and at his own request read it to him."

"And it was well you did so, as he could not have read it himself, at least since then," said the doctor drily. "From his wife, you said?"

"I didn't say anything," snapped Mrs. Delane. "I would not have told you now if Mr. Smith had been getting better. It is

only because you say it is a serious matter that I consult you at all. Of course I need not consult you, for the matter of that, only two heads are sometimes better than one."

"Of course, of course," assented the doctor. But he added nothing more. He was going to allow Mrs. Delane plenty of rope.

"Do you know who he is, and who his wife is?" hissed Mrs. Bridget so close to his ear that Gregorius instinctively edged his chair away.

"No, upon my honour I don't!"

"He is the Cyril Russell who shot Frank Harrison in the streets of Shanghai two years ago."

"Cyril Russell? Frank Harrison? I don't recollect the story at all," said the doctor peevishly. "You forget how long a time two years is, and how a man down here in Formosa does not take a fierce interest in the Shanghai people and their doings. What was the story?"

Had Mrs. Delane been a little less eager to tell, she might have noticed how exceeding quietly the doctor received her information. But that he was listening was quite sufficient for her purpose.

"Oh, you must know the whole story, though you pretend to forget it," she said. "There was such a big scandal about it. Cyril Russell had a lovely wife, and he was—well, jealous of her and Frank Harrison. Jealous with good cause too, as I can tell you another day! So one fine afternoon, just as Harrison was leaving the Club, Russell put a bullet into him. Not meaning to kill him, it was said, but merely to teach him a little lesson. But Frank Harrison died,—a man who had lived such a fast life as his could not expect to recover,—and Russell was tried for murder in the Supreme Court. Do you remember now?"

"Ah yes," said the doctor. "They acquitted him, or said 'Justifiable homicide,' didn't they?"

"They acquitted him altogether, let him off scotfree. No jury, in the East at least, would have convicted him. But of course he had to disappear, and when the excitement was over every one forgot him. His wife was shipped off somewhere before the trial; no one knew what became of her. All that was certain, and has been certain, is that she was never divorced. They said he kept her for the children's sake; there were two children, a girl and a boy. I have a notion, though, that the boy died during the trial, so there can only be the girl left. And now Cyril Russell turns up here!"

"Are you sure of your facts, Mrs. Delane? Why should this man necessarily be your Cyril Russell?"

"Why? Read this."

And by the light of the drawing-room lamp Dr. Gregorius read :

*"Hakodate, May 6.*

*"My dearest Cyril,*

*"I have at last found out where you are from the Bank people, when I went to get my last money. There was a new young man, and he told me.*

*"Every time I touch the money I can't help believing that you do still love me, away down in your heart, and that some day you will forgive me, and take me back again. Why are you so cruel to me? Why do you never write? I have told you how sorry I am, and how I would do anything, anything, if you would only forgive me. That is all I want, dear, dear Cyril. For our dead Gerald's sake—my boy and yours—for poor little Ida, without a father, forgive me and take me back. I am making Ida address the envelope. I make her say a prayer for you every day.*

*Your heart-broken wife,  
Sybil Russell."*

The doctor read the letter through twice, and then made a movement as if to put it into his pocket.

“Give it to me, doctor.” Mrs. Delane almost snatched the letter from Gregorius’ hand. “What do you think I ought to do in answer to this?”

“Do?” answered the doctor grimly. “Is there anything to do just now? Had you not better wait for Smith to say what he wishes done himself?”

“But you say he will never say——”

“Ah, true. Then you will be able, in a few days’ time, to write and inform his widow that her letter has killed him.”

---



## CHAPTER IV.

A letter, addressed in Mrs. Delane's best and clearest hooks and claws, plentifully underlined and besprinkled with points of exclamation, went to Hakodate by next steamer.

It was deeply bordered with black, although no death had been registered at the Consulate in the meanwhile. But Mrs. Delane had felt that the importance of her missive demanded something striking to the outward eye. She wished Mrs. Smith, or rather Mrs. Russell, to get a shock; and she considered herself the only person courageous enough to give it. Mrs. Delane prided herself upon her "courage." She no more minded bustling into a "poker"-party at the Outdoor Customs' Mess than she minded questioning her luckless female inferiors on the domestic arrangements of their own houses and those of their bachelor neighbours. And, above all, Mrs. Delane prided herself on the construction of "masterpieces" in letter-writing.

Since that evening in the verandah when she had told him Smith's sad story and showed him the letter, Dr. Gregorius had avoided the Commissioner's wife. Truth to tell, he felt a little ashamed of himself for the part he had played as receiver of confidences. He tried to assure himself that he could not have acted otherwise; that it would have been waste of time and of

energy to have remonstrated with Mrs. Bridget ; to have spoken out and let her see what *he* thought of her doings. He had even let her keep the letter,—to show all round the Settlement. For show it she certainly would, and come to discuss it with Smith himself, too, directly she knew he was out of danger.

For Smith, though direly, seriously ill, was no longer in imminent danger. Weak enough certainly not to be allowed to speak, or to ask questions awkward to answer. But this state of matters could not last long ; and on the morning when Smith had insisted on speaking, and had given evidence of his convalescence by plentifully “bobbering” the boy, Eugen Gregorius went up the hill and demanded audience of Mrs. Delane.

The good lady was entertaining a morning caller. The harbour-master’s wife, an untidy, thriftless woman with an inconveniently large family, was receiving doles of ancient underclothing and ragged furs.

“We must all be kind to her when she comes,” Mrs. Delane was saying as the door opened on Dr. Gregorius. “We must give her the chance of redeeming her past and of blotting out her wrong-doings. I shall look to you to help me, Mrs. Slade.”

The words, spoken in a significant voice, naturally arrested the doctor’s attention. Scarcely had Mrs. Slade bowed herself out of the room when he asked :—

“Who is arriving, Mrs. Delane? Any fresh movements in the service?”

“If you had come to see me yesterday I would have told you yesterday,” answered Mrs. Delane. “And I should have been glad of your opinion. Only you have seemed lately to forget that your most important patients—by important I mean those who pay you most—live up the hill!”

Mrs. Delane was clearly offended, and, as usual when offended, insulting.

"Well, what is it?" asked the doctor, entirely ignoring the last speech.

Mrs. Delane's dignity struggled for one instant with her overwhelming desire to speak. Then, flinging herself heavily into a rocking-chair, she began, very hurriedly and very defiantly :—

"You told me I ought to answer that letter, so I obeyed you. I wrote to Mrs. Russell by Wednesday's steamer and told her to come at once, if she wished to see her husband alive."

"Ach, *so* !"

Such a *so* had never before sounded in Mrs. Delane's ears. She brought up the rocking-chair with a sudden jerk, and stared at the doctor. He was viciously hitting his boot with a little bamboo switch.

"It isn't *my* fault, doctor," she began. "*You* told me to write, so I wrote. And as I wrote it came to me that here was a good chance of mending two people's lives, of reconciling them to each other in death, if not in life, of letting the child see her father again. I asked her to come at once, and wrote to Mrs. Knox in Amoy to telegraph to Hakodate that a letter was coming. I acted on your responsibility, doctor !"

Dr. Gregorius had stood up as she was speaking, and was now turning the handle of the door.

"I've done right, haven't I? Come to dinner this evening and we will talk it over. See, I was looking out some crape for her !" cried Mrs. Bridget, now really alarmed at the silence of Gregorius.

The rocking-chair went down with a bang, and Mrs. Delane positively flung herself upon the doctor's arm.

"Done right?" he said. "Oh yes, of course you have done right? You always do when you play the part of a special Providence !"

He looked her calmly in the face as he said this, so calmly that Mrs. Delane never suspected the genuineness of his praise.

But as he went down the hill Eugen Gregorius debated with himself whether in some cases killing should be reckoned as murder.

---

## CHAPTER V.

“Doctor, I wish I hadn’t followed your advice and written to Mrs. Russell to come! Suppose she goes on here as she did in Shanghai?”

Poor Dr. Gregorius had heard this speech many, many times since Mr. Delane, returned from Kelung, had ventured on the unwise remark that it would be amusing to have another woman in the place. He had suffered much for this indiscretion, had the unfortunate Commissioner, and so had the doctor. Mrs. Bridget was beginning to see there were other sides to the question.

“I suppose she will go to Kelung with her husband,” Gregorius used to answer quietly.

“Oh yes, of course. How I wish she were here! Do you know, doctor, that I am afraid she will not be kindly received down at the Customs? I am quite astonished at Mrs. Slade’s narrow-mindedness. And Mrs. Lucas is nearly as bad. Such a sad lack of Christian charity! As if any one whom I choose to associate with was not good enough for them, forsooth!”

Thus it had gone on, the interminable round of platitudes, the repetition of heartless gossip, of spiteful innuendo, right up to the day of Mrs. Russell’s arrival. And from the Commissioner’s house Eugen Gregorius had been obliged to pass to Cyril Russell’s bed

to read the reproach in the sick man's eyes, and to feel that, in spite of his solemn asseverations to the contrary, his patient more than half believed that he, Gregorius, was responsible for this coming. For the doctor, in a cowardly moment, shrinking from dealing the blow, had agreed to allow Mrs. Delane to break the news to Cyril. How she had done her work he had never enquired; how she was capable of doing her task had never dawned on him until it was too late. Unfortunate Gregorius, with no consolation but an extra three fingers in his long glass!

Cyril Russell was nearly well when Mrs. Delane rushed in haste down the hill to tell him his wife was on board the steamer lying outside the bar waiting for the tide to turn. Should she send out the launch to bring her in? Or, better still, should she go out herself to fetch her?

The sick man rose with an effort, and towered, shakily, above Mrs. Bridget. She wished he had stayed in his chair! If there was one thing she disliked, it was being overshadowed.

"Mrs. Delane," he said, slowly and distinctly, bringing out each word with an effort, "I must beg you not to interfere at all in my family affairs. I myself will send and fetch my wife and child. I do not wish her to see you at all."

And send and fetch her he undoubtedly would have done, had not his legs suddenly given way under him, and he had clutched wildly at Mrs. Delane herself as he felt himself sinking back, with a roaring in his ears and a pinky light before his eyes that suddenly went out into black darkness.

Mrs. Delane had saved his fall. He was in his armchair once more, but speechless. And she left him thus to make her own arrangements for his welfare.

\* \* \* \* \*

So *this* was the woman about whom they had made such a fuss in Shanghai! A fuss to the extent of losing a life! Mrs. Delane had always, with what seemed to her ample reason,

despised Shanghai taste. For they had never appreciated *her* there! Here, then, was a specimen of their "beauty!" Mrs. Delane felt a kindliness engendered by an immense relief, by an absolute assurance that there was nothing to dread from this woman, the minute she set her eyes on Mrs. Russell's face.

Two years of poverty, of shame and of loneliness had played the very devil with that once pretty face. Add to this that Mrs. Russell had been horribly sea-sick crossing from Amoy, and there is small reason to wonder that she looked sallow and dowdy. Her hair strayed untidily around her face, her dress was stained and shabby. The eyes were still lovely, but oh, so heavy and despairing, with such dark rings under the long lashes! A cold chill ran down Mrs. Delane's back. It was as though grave-clothes had been suddenly opened and she was facing a ghost.

Moreover, Mrs. Russell utterly declined all offers of hospitality from the Commissioner's wife. She had come to see her husband, and she wished to do so at once. She did not even seem to notice that she was no longer "Mrs. Smith" but "Mrs. Russell" to them all. She went off in the doctor's boat, leaving the amah to follow with all she had on board.

"There's something queer about her," Mrs. Delane confided to Mrs. Slade, who was awaiting her by order on the Customs' jetty. "I shouldn't wonder if she drank. And, bless my soul, I've come away without looking at her luggage and her child! I must send for the amah to-morrow."

---

## CHAPTER VI.

Back to Kelung they had gone, the Russell-Smith family! And this without so much as saying "with your leave" or "by your leave" or even "goodbye!"

Mrs. Bridget was thoroughly disgusted when the news came to her next morning with her early coffee. She at once ordered the Commissioner to order them back, and to dispatch a special messenger for that purpose.

"But I can't, my dear," Mr. Delane urged nervously. "Kelung is his post. I didn't send him there; the I.G. did. You must apply to the I.G. if you wish him transferred."

He was swallowing his coffee at a choking rate, anxious to get out of the room. A scalded mouth was a small price to pay for deliverance.

"Hm!" said Mrs. Bridget tartly. She didn't quite see her way to writing to the I.G. But there were plenty of ways of making Mr. Delane do so.

Just for the present, however, there was nothing to be done or heard. Gregorius was away at Kelung too, and made a pretty long stay at Twatutia on his way back. Nor, when he came, could she induce him to say anything about the Russells.



And yet Dr. Gregorius might have told her much, if he had only chosen.

To him it had been a ghastly shock, a scene never to be forgotten, that meeting between the husband and the wife, between two people who had once held the whole world cheap in comparison with their great love for each other. There was still the love—or was it love? Was it not rather the despairing cringe for the master's lash, for anything, blows, insults, curses, anything except to be ignored?—on the wife's side. But on Cyril's side there was—nothing; absolutely no response. Indeed, save for a slight drawing-in of the lips, save for a faint tremble in the thin hands clutching the arms of the chair, there was no outward sign that he marked her presence. When she came forward and flung herself at his feet and kissed his hands, he did not draw them away. They only fell limp, lifeless, when she let them go, and when, regardless of the presence of Gregorius, trying to efface himself through the doorway, she moaned out:—

“You *will* forgive me, Cyril? Please, please do.”

“Gregorius, I am tired. Send the boy to help me to bed.”

And without deigning a glance at the now sobbing woman, Cyril Russell walked into his own room, and locked the door behind him.

Eugen Gregorius stood still in the doorway, and looked with wondering eyes on Mrs. Russell.

She was sitting in a heap on the floor, her face resting on the empty armchair, sobbing bitterly. The doctor could see the tears running down through her fingers, and hear them drip, dripping on the matting-covered floor. He was unused to a woman's tears, and they affected him strangely. His naturally tender heart melted at the sight of this great wretchedness, and an anger against Cyril, and a pity for Cyril's wife, took possession of him, utterly driving out all thought of the miserable past that had been the cause of the misery of this meeting.

"Mrs. Russell," he said, coming forward, after having tried in vain, by sundry coughings and sneezings, to make known his presence, "you had better go to bed now. Your husband is weak and tired. You should not have excited him to-night."

Mrs. Russell caught the note of sympathy in his voice at once, and lifted up a tear-stained face to him. Then she sadly shook her head.

"You are kind, doctor, but you are wrong. He will never, never forgive me. I know him; and I read it in his face this evening. I wish I had never been born!"

What more the doctor might have volunteered by way of sympathy it is impossible to say, for at that moment the door was thrown open, and a girl of some six or seven years dashed into the room, followed by an amah carrying a solemn infant of some sixteen or eighteen months. An infant with its mother's eyes, but with those eyes without soul and without expression. And as he looked at it Eugen Gregorius with a sudden revulsion of feeling grasped the fact that the wrong Mrs. Russell had done her family was one neither husband nor child could lightly forgive, one for which she herself should never have asked forgiveness.

The sins of the parents are still visited upon their innocent children. Frank Harrison's child was a hopeless imbecile.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Master talky, wanchee see baby," whispered the boy to the doctor.

"What is your name?" Gregorius asked the little girl, in an ingratiating tone. She was a pert, spoilt Eastern child, who had been thumping her mother to induce her to lift up her head, whining "Mummy! Mummy!" without ceasing. She now looked at the doctor, with one finger in her mouth, her head tilted on one side.

"Ida Russell," she said. "Why?"

"Come with me, and I will tell you a secret," the doctor answered, in what he meant to be a wheedling voice. And with

some difficulty he got her out of the room, and delivered her to the boy, to be conveyed to her father.

Then he returned to the parlour, where the amah had managed to soothe and smooth Mrs. Russell down. The baby had been transferred to its mother's knee, and the amah was bringing in some of her numerous packages. Mrs. Russell was quiet now, had once almost smiled, when the door was again flung violently open, and Ida, pursued by the boy, flew to her mother and clutched her tightly.

"He told me I was going to see Father!" she cried, stamping her foot at the doctor, who had unwisely shewn signs of drawing near. "And it wasn't Father at all! A hateful, ugly man who wanted to kiss me, and then called me a little liar because I said we had a baby——"

"Hush!"

But when Mrs. Russell looked anxiously round to see if Dr. Gregorius had heard, he was nowhere to be seen. He was in Cyril Russell's room, by his bedside.

"What do you want, Gregorius?" came from under the sheet.

"I came to see if you wanted anything," answered the doctor, with an attempt at jocularitv. "Have you any orders to give? You are almost out of my hands as a patient now."

The sheet was impatiently kicked off, and Cyril Russell sat bolt upright, looking straight into the doctor's eyes.

Gregorius flinched. Cyril's eyes were hard and stony, the eyes of a man grown desperate. Such must have been his eyes two years ago, when——

"I ask you as a favour (he stressed on the last word) to convey me, and Mrs. Russell and her family, to Kelung to-morrow. And then please forget us, as I shall try to forget the mischief you have done me."

The doctor was stung out of all self-control by Cyril's words. All his Teutonic views of chivalry, of suffering misunderstanding

for a woman's sake, went to the wall. Why, indeed, should he be misunderstood for the sake of a Mrs. Delane?

"Before God, Smith," he said solemnly, "I never did nor wished to do you any mischief. It has been entirely Mrs. Delane's doing from beginning to end."

"Ah, that is German fashion, is it not? to shelter yourself behind a petticoat," sneered Russell. "Tell that to the woman you have brought to curse my eyes with; *she* may believe you! But remember that though she is dead to me, she can never be alive to any one else. My love for her is dead, but no one else shall ever love her. She shall be as wretched as she has made me. Now go and tell her that!"

Then it dawned upon Eugen Gregorius that Cyril Russell was trying to quarrel with him.

"You shall go to Kelung to-morrow," he said quietly. "I will take the journey upon myself."

And that was how the Russell-Smith family went to Kelung.

---

## CHAPTER VII.

And was there then no place of repentance for Sybil Russell, though she sought it diligently and with tears?

None, so far as Gregorius could see, when he went over to visit Kelung some three months later, in the fever-reeking month of September. Mrs. Delane had gone to Kelung in the meanwhile, and had returned breathing out threatenings and slaughters. What had exactly happened on that trip never transpired, but the doctor gathered enough from the hints and accusations which she freely dropped that Mrs. Delane's welcome had been anything but cordial.

"Mr. Russell should certainly be in a madhouse." So she wound up. "As for that baby, it ought to have been put out of the way long ago. A lethal chamber would be the kindest thing for it. Mrs. Russell? She probably drinks, or takes opium if she can't get the liquor. She looks like an opium-eater, and, since she has the tendency, we ought not to wonder at her taking it, considering the life she leads!"

Mrs. Delane's theories, with which she usually began her sentences, invariably became positive facts as she ended her speeches.

So it was quite decided in the solar system of Hôbé, which revolved round Mrs. Delane as its sun, that Cyril Russell's wife

was a drunkard, if not a slave to opium. As for Cyril himself, whoever heard of a murderer who was not a brute? They were evidently persons, these two Russells, who were amply fulfilling the promise their past had given.

Dr. Gregorius heard this, as he heard everything else, with an air of studied indifference. He longed to go and find out the truth for himself, but he did not venture to do so. You cannot force yourself upon some one who does not want you; and Eugen knew he was not wanted. And all the time that part of his heart which had been kept tender all these years, almost unbeknown to himself, was aching for the unfortunate pair,—for the husband with his shattered home and life, but still more for the wife whom the husband so inexorably wished dead.

But the summons to go came at last, as all things come round to him who learns to wait. It came from Cyril Russell himself. The children were down with fever, and the doctor's presence was necessary. The note was ungraciously worded, but that did not matter. The doctor could appreciate the effort it had been to write at all.

They were very ill, those children, and Gregorius had hard work to pull them round. Nor was there, indeed, chance of complete recovery for them without change of air, that almost certain cure for malarial fever. Back to Hôbé they must go with the doctor, and their mother had better come with them. She looked decidedly in need of a change.

Not a word, not a sign, had Cyril Russell vouchsafed to his wife all the four anxious days Gregorius had spent at Kelung. And now, when the doctor made his proposal, he turned on his heel and walked out of the room.

"Nasty man, Father!" repeated little Ida in her shrill voice. "He is always making Mummy cry. You will be glad to get away from him, won't you, Mummy dear? I want to go away, I do, I do!"

Mrs. Russell's face was crimson, but she took no notice of the peevish child. And Gregorius, vexed to his soul, went out to make preparations for the return journey.

"Dr. Gregorius."

Mrs. Russell was behind him. The flush had not yet died out of her face, and her lips were trembling.

"I am not going with you. I will stay and take care of my husband. The amah can look after the children. She is good, and they do not need me now."

"Neither does he," broke from Dr. Gregorius before he could check himself. "He is killing you with his silence. Good God, Madam, is not this life, which he makes you lead, a hell on earth to you? I do not think you deserve this treatment, I cannot believe it is manly, or just!"

Mrs. Russell shook her head sorrowfully. Then she drew herself up, and a flash of pride, a look from the old dead days, passed over her face.

"My husband has been always right, Dr. Gregorius. I am quite satisfied with my life."

But then she broke down again, and whispered with a sob:—

"Do you know that, just now, he has nursed Baby quite as much as he has nursed Ida? And this morning he scolded Ida quite sharply for speaking pertly to me. I think I see the beginning of the end."



SHANGHAI :  
PRINTED BY KELLY AND WALSH, LIMITED.

---

1897.



*No. 3.—In the Sixties.*

*No. 4.—Playing Providence.*

Nos. 5 & 6.

# CHINA COAST TALES

BY

LISE BOEHM.

. . . . *un volume que les sottises humaines m'ont aisément four*

LE DIABLE BOITEU



SINGAPORE-HONGKONG-SHANGHAI-YOKOHAMA :  
KELLY AND WALSH, LIMITED.

1899.



*Herbert Clark Hoover.*

BY THE SAME AUTHOR:

VOL. I. { No. 1.—*Dobson's Daughter.*  
          { No. 2.—*Of the Noble Army.*

VOL. II. { No. 3.—*In the Sixties.*  
          { No. 4.—*Playing Providence.*

Nos. 5 & 6.

# CHINA COAST TALES

BY

LISE BOEHM.

. . . . un volume que les sottises humaines m'ont aisément four

LE DIABLE BOITEU



SINGAPORE-HONGKONG-SHANGHAI-YOKOHAMA :  
KELLY AND WALSH, LIMITED.

1899.



No. 5.

# COMING HOME

*A CHINA COAST TALE*

BY

LISE BOEHM.

*"East, West, Home's Best."*





# COMING HOME.

*East, West, Home's Best.*

## CHAPTER I.

IT would have puzzled a wiser head than stands on the shoulders of most people to tell which felt the most nervous: Sandy Gordon's two sisters waiting for their brother's train to steam into the dirty terminus; or Alexander Gordon himself, trying to spread himself over the whole of a first-class carriage so as to create that impression which he knew he was expected to produce, now, on his first return from the Far East.

For the day and the hour had come at last, that day and that hour of which his mother and his sisters had spoken so often, which had seemed so very far away to Sandy himself even last year, when he had known he was coming home and when he could count the time by months. Yet now, with the day and the hour, had come a shyness for which Sandy could not account, and which he resented as being unnatural to himself. For was not he a Gilltonian born and bred, and when you have said that, is it necessary to add anything else?

Yet, for the benefit of those outsiders who may still sit in Cimmerian darkness, it may be explained that Gilltown is the hub of the Universe, and that nothing, absolutely nothing, can resist the "push" of her sons. If you are a Lowlander, or, still deeper depth, an Englishman, you had better suppress the fact

in Gilltown. Now this estimate of Gilltown is not fanciful, but actually historical. The Gilltonians have justified their boasting. East and west, north and south you find them, and not in the gutter, but high up among the towers and palaces. When the Dr. Nansen of the future lays his finger on the North Pole, surely the Scotchman he will find sitting on it will be a Gilltonian. Gilltonians flourish everywhere, become everything,—so soon as they leave their native place behind them.

All through the years of his sojourn in the Far East Sandy Gordon had stalked, bearing his head on high, in Gilltonian pride. Many strange and wondrous sights had he seen, but had he ever expressed his astonishment at, or admiration of, them? No, by no means no! Awkward, uncomfortable moments he had lived through too, when the lighter-minded, frivolous Saxon, or still more unreliable Continental, had shrugged shoulders scornfully, or muttered contemptuous asides concerning him, as he steadily buttoned up his pockets against the fascinations of poker, nap, and *pari-mutuel*. It was the remembrance of Gilltown, and the dignity which was laid upon him to sustain, which had soothed him on such occasions;—for Sandy had a temper as fiery as his hair.

And thus it had gone on year after year, until Gilltown itself had faded in his memory into an unreality, into an Arcadia where it was always cool in summer, and bright and genially frosty in winter; an Arcadia whose maidens were more beautiful far than all the beauties of the East; an Arcadia where you were always certain of good, health-giving food, of real porridge and substantial cream, of scones, of shortbread and of Scotch bun,—the genuine article, untainted by tin wrappings and the voyage! Ten years and more of absence had only made the heart of Sandy grow fonder, and he had bidden his less fortunate compatriots in the East “good-bye” with a

beaming countenance. They had still years of bondage to put through for their Rachel; Sandy was free, with a sound purse and a sound body, with an assured position to return to "in his own time," and bound for Gilltown. Such a present, and such a future, leaves no room for regret for a past.

No longer "Sandy" Gordon in Gilltown either; no more the boy who had been cuffed and kicked and bullied when little, only to cuff and kick and bully in his turn as he had grown older! No, "Alexander Gordon, Esq.," now, trusted and confidential manager and future partner in one of the biggest firms in the Far East, with more power over the destinies of men in his little finger than the Lord Provost possessed in his whole body, his robes and chain of office thrown in! A "catch" indeed for the most aristocratic spinster in Gilltown, and a pride and credit to the great clan whose name he bore!

But (as before-mentioned) as the end of his journey grew nearer, Alexander Gordon felt this unusual and uncomfortable sensation which we have named "shyness" gradually creep over him, and take possession slowly and surely of his brain and of his heart. Of his brain, as in a sudden flash there yawned before him the pit whence he had been digged, the real actual home to which he had been accustomed before Fate had turned his steps Eastward. That row of miserable dwellings in a back slum of the town he was now passing through,—of what did they remind him? Surely, surely this could not be the street in which an aunt had dwelt, from whose backyard he had so often yelled defiance to the engine-drivers on passing trains, in those holiday visits which had been such treats only some fifteen years ago? Alexander looked down on his fur cuffs, and on his brand-new yellow leather Gladstone bag, and rubbed his eyes as he mentally measured the change those fifteen years had wrought. And then a stab as of fear pierced

him. What if the change that had, all unconsciously, been wrought in him had not been wrought in his own home-people also? What if they still were what he had been?

Sandy caught his breath at the idea for one instant. Only for one; his Gilltonian pride reasserted itself the next moment. They, too, had changed; he was sure of it. Their place of abode was changed; their means had become enlarged. Prosperity had visited the family, although in one case it had come too late. Sandy's father had died only a few months ago; died without even knowing that his son was coming home. He had died "comfortable," as the Gilltown folk express it. But to Sandy that empty armchair meant a terrible void, a chill at the heart. There was no one left now to understand what he had accomplished. No praise from friend or neighbour could ever convey the glow of proud satisfaction which would have been Sandy's hardly-earned, long-expected reward for good work done. His mother and his sisters—what was their opinion worth? Women praise loudly what is not worth mentioning; they pass by with a trifling commonplace what means a man's life-blood. Decidedly, Sandy would be glad when it was this day next week.

A change of guard at the next station brought a fresh sensation. The new official eyed him suspiciously as he examined his ticket and punched a hole in the small space still remaining intact. Then he coughed, half closed the door, and reopened it immediately to say:

"It is Gilltown you are for, Mr. Gordon?"

And almost before the astonished Sandy could stammer out a "yes," the door was shut, and the traveller left to cudgel his brains trying to recall the strangely familiar voice and face.

His own cousin, Jimmy Gordon! Why, of course it was. Sandy recollected the day when it had been the pride

and delight of his heart to walk alongside this stalwart, handsome young fellow. His sister Maggie had been often chaffed about him, when she had shyly produced Jimmy's gifts and shared them with her brother,—digestion-destroying "jaw-pullers" in sticky papers! But surely all that nonsense was over by now. If not, Sandy would soon put a stop to it. Must, indeed, if his dream was ever to become reality.

For Sandy had been supported through all his social trials and slights in the Far East (where, as elsewhere, men are classed rather by their manners than by their merits) by one amazing vision, which he had purposed should become reality during his sojourn at home. That vision had been one of a glorious revenge. Those mockers, or at least one representative enemy, should be silenced, dumbfounded, annihilated, by beholding Sandy's glory in his own native place. He would invite the victim to pay him a friendly visit. The victim should accept the invitation, and then—

Who would have believed, even if he had heard it with his ears, what mad possibilities used to surge through that canny Scotchman's brain? Provosts, Lord Rectors of the University, gorgeous civic and academic robes, skirling bagpipes, bonfires . . . . But here, in the present, was Jimmy Gordon again, evidently quite determined to give his cousin the opportunity of recognising and owning him. And as this in no way interfered with the Plan (what was sauce for Sandy not being necessarily sauce for his sister), Sandy would most certainly have entered into friendly converse with his kinsman had not his attention been caught by a face passing in a rapid walk up and down the station, where they were timed to wait ten minutes, which vision suddenly froze the genial current of his soul towards Jimmy.

She was just passing his carriage when Jimmy sauntered up again, and she caught sight of Sandy's face.

"Mr. Gordon! I *am* surprised to meet you here! I never expected to see any one I knew at this Back of Beyond!"

A tall and graceful lady, whose bright golden hair shone all the brighter above her widow's dress. Handsome, perhaps, rather than pretty, and queenly more than engaging. Yet, though her presence was neither irritating nor confusing, Sandy blushed exceedingly, and Jimmy moved silently away.

"I am for Gilltown, Mrs. Peregrine-Searle. I—am glad—"

Alexander Gordon, Esq., where is your self-possession? Gone,—for the moment, at any rate. It is only later that you will remember how this woman, in the days when she was queen of the outport in which you first rubbed off your awkwardness,—how she made you her butt, her laughing-stock, her *souffre-douleur*, too; and all because she knew you felt, but dared not resent, these things. For was she not the only lady in the place, and the first woman you had come across in the East? Times are changed now; her husband is dead, and has bequeathed his widow to his friends. She is poor now, while you, Sandy, are rich. And yet, and yet, in her presence you are even now as a whipped schoolboy!

"All take your places, please."

Then there was a banging of doors, and Mrs. Peregrine-Searle disappeared. Nor, when Sandy got out at Gilltown, and fell into the arms of his waiting sisters, did he catch a glimpse of her again. This was not for want of looking, however, and it struck with a chill into his sisters' hearts that their brother paid more attention to the luggage-van than to them.

---

## CHAPTER II.

*"Mrs. and the Misses Gordon  
request the pleasure of your Company  
on Friday, November 28,  
from 7 to 11 P.M.,  
to meet their son and brother,  
Mr. Alexander Gordon,  
of Shanghai."*

There had been a great fluttering among the dovecots, and deep searchings of heart among the dressmakers in Gilltown, ever since everybody who was anybody had received the foregoing invitation; that is, about a week before Sandy's arrival. A month's notice; then the function required new frocks. The Gordons were not given to entertaining, but when they did entertain it was in style. Not a twopenny-halfpenny lemonade and soda-water dance, with meagre sandwiches, and ices with unspeakable flavours, but a solid champagne-supper "Conversazione" or "soirée" was in store for the fashionables of Gilltown.

There were heart-burnings, too; and unkind aspersions had been thrown on the heads of the Gordons by those whom they had left behind on the climbing road that leads to



position in Gilltown. Pretty Jessie Ross, the old left-hand neighbour, had nearly cried her eyes out when the dweller on the right, Rhoda Stewart, the homely-featured daughter of a stonemason who had developed into a successful building speculator,—when Rhoda had been bidden to the *soirée*, while she herself had not been asked. Sandy had been her playmate, always, in the old days. Why was Grace Gordon so unkind? Precisely because—he had been her playmate.

The amount of calls Mrs. Gordon received during the week following the issue of her invitations was quite without parallel in the family history. All the mothers with eligible daughters—and there were many such in Gilltown—brought these young ladies to be inspected by Mrs. Gordon. Every one who had ever known, no matter how slightly, one of the Gordons, came with the express intent of being invited. That time of triumph was very sweet to old Mrs. Gordon. For years she had been obliged to eat out her proud heart with vexation at seeing her Grace, her Maggie, flouted by other girls whose claim to gentility was only one generation higher up. There are so many little ways of leaving girls who never had a grandfather out in the cold at a public dance, or a charity bazaar! Now, the Gordons' enemies were their footstool, and they were, either in a friendly or in an envious manner, the talk of the town!

Sandy too, on his arrival, entirely approved of what had been done. He stipulated, indeed, for liberty to invite a few friends should he happen to meet them,—friends, he was careful to add, who should in no wise be connected with Gilltown. A few acquaintances in the Far East had settled in various parts of the surrounding country. He might chance to meet them.

“A few Chinese mandarins?” hazarded his mother. That *would* be grand, though perhaps inconveniently so!

"No, no, mother. I wouldn't bring a Chinaman into your house. I meant ladies, gentlemen, friends—"

Sandy felt himself getting hot. But, luckily, getting hot does not shew in a blush on a tanned skin. He had chosen his victim; not, as he had formerly planned, from the male sex, but from the female. The woman who was to be dragged at his chariot-wheels should be the one on whom, of all others, he had always longed to revenge himself: Mrs. Peregrine-Searle.

In the meanwhile, here he was in Gilltown—in the handsome house which had been his father's last care and pride—as totally cut off from the old child-life as though it had never existed. He could not picture his father in the midst of this luxury, in these fine rooms and statue-guarded corridors; and thus the blank which he had so dreaded to find, the empty arm-chair which had given such a pang in anticipation, these things simply were not. His sisters likewise had completely changed. Grace, shy, sensitive Grace, had become hard and assertive. Out of sheer self-defence; but how was Sandy to know this? Maggie had developed into a nervous-giggler, who was treated as a child by her elder sister. And Sandy himself—Alec they called him now!—realised in a flash how much he, too, must have changed, by the nervous, hasty kiss which his own mother, arrayed in a silk that literally stood by itself, had bestowed—upon his forehead!

They were discussing him now, these three women, he felt, when they had wished him good-night and left him to his blazing fire (Gilltown is cold in November) and luxurious silk quilt and chilly embroidered linen sheets. Sandy half wished that everything was not so grand, that his boasted Gilltown home was not so close to his own description of it. Something was wanting, and something more than his

hard-headed money-making father. Decidedly, the softness of the East, the family-feeling among the foreigners there, the want of ceremony, the carelessness of unconventionality, had affected even this stolid Gilltonian. Home-coming was not all he had imagined it would be !

And in another room hard by, his mother, her stiffness laid aside with her silk, was trying to soothe herself into the belief that her Sandy was just the same, just as much her own dear boy as he had been when she had caned him soundly for falling asleep in church during the sermon after a heavy Sabbath pudding.

---

## CHAPTER III.

Gilltown by daylight, after a shivering night in those chilly linen sheets, was naturally another disappointment. The view out of his bedroom window, of other houses with precisely similar windows, walls, and grey slate roofs, was not pleasing to eyes that had beheld, and admired in spite of themselves, some of the grandest as well as most entrancing scenes on this earth. And then, how low the sky seemed! The clouds were almost touching the slated roof opposite, and through a drizzling Scotch mist the umbrellaed passengers splashed to and fro.

Still, for a dweller in the East a walk is a necessity, and since neither Grace nor Maggie would hear of venturing out, and his mother seemed totally engrossed in the kitchen, of which, indeed, she was altogether the governing and moving spirit, Sandy wrapped himself up in his greatcoat and went out into the rain alone.

It was all new ground to him for some half-hour. Here he remembered fields; but on them had now sprung up endless rows of suburban villas, detached, semi-detached, or arranged in flats, but all with pretentious names and white-lace-curtained windows. There, where an old farmhouse had once stood,

a gaily-painted tram was starting: doubtless a good investment. His eye noted, with a painful surprise, the number of injured persons that passed him. Eyes, arms, legs, were missing. Could it be that in former days he had beheld these sorrows without being conscious of them? Or, was this the price Gilltown had to pay for its rising manufactures?

Even the High Street had changed. On all sides old and dilapidated shops were being replaced by shining plate-glass windows and handsome buildings. Down the street Sandy sauntered, marking here and there a once familiar name. And as he walked, the feeling of disappointment, of crampedness, of having grown out of and beyond everything, gradually faded from him, and he held up his head as a proud son of Gilltown once more.

But he also became conscious, as he walked on into parts more familiar, that he was the cynosure of neighbouring eyes. And what was exciting attention soon became evident. The High School boys, as miserably clad and as dirty little urchins as are to be found in the British Isles, rushed after him to jeer at his hat. Now Sandy was wearing an elegant Terai structure, suitably adorned, such as is affected by the fashionable in foreign parts. Angry to find himself a source of amusement to these mudlarks, he quickly turned down a side street near the docks, and found himself in front of his old home.

Fashionable this quarter certainly was not, and poor and shabby the house looked compared with the elegant "West End" mansion his people were now occupying. But there must really have developed in Sandy, during his years of absence, more of sentimentality than exists in the breast of the average Gilltonian. For he actually, though temporarily, regretted that this was no longer his home.

No longer his, but surely no stranger dwelt in it. For a familiar brass-plate on the door bore the name, *James Ross, Junior*.

The plate was unmistakable, though how it came to be here was most mysterious. James Ross, Junior, had been his father's partner in old days. "Junior?" He must be very senior by now. Indeed, James Ross had once been old Gordon's master. But that was before Sandy was born. He had been over-fond of that strong "usquebagh" which, together with porridge, is all a Highlander needs in the way of food. From master he had sunk to partner; so much Sandy knew. But what since? That he should learn when the bell he had unconsciously pulled had ceased clanging in the old way along the echoing stone-paved passage, and when the door should be opened.

After all, perhaps he ought not to have been surprised at the name on the door. For the widow of James Ross's only son had been Sandy's next door neighbour, and James Ross's granddaughter had been his (Sandy's) first love and professed sweetheart. A grave-looking, thin, ungraceful slip of a girl she had grown into before Sandy had left Gilltown, quite unlike the rosy-cheeked, curly-headed, dirty-faced little maiden of his High School days. Strange that his sisters had never once mentioned her in their half-yearly letters (the Gordons were not a letter-writing family); stranger still that Sandy himself had so utterly forgotten her, when everything in the old Gilltown life had seemed so deeply imprinted on his memory! But the door was open now, and the familiar reek of strong tobacco rushed upon him as he asked, peering into the darkness of the passage, if Mr. Ross was to be seen.

Straight into the old parlour, where the old horse-hair sofa in its ancient place, the chairs, even the initials scratched in the corner of the window-frame made Sandy doubt whether

he had really ever been away, the old man dragged him. Then he drew Sandy to the window, turned up his face to the light, felt his shoulders, examined his hands, and, holding him at arm's length, eyed him critically from head to foot. This done, he wrung both Sandy's hands, and clapped the unfortunate visitor on the back with a vigour that would have felled any one but a Gilltonian.

"You favour your mother," he remarked in a satisfied tone. "Sit you down, sit you down, I'm glad to see you. Jessie, my girl, bring the whisky and the glasses! I'm all but a teetotaller now, but we must drink your health, Sandy, my man, we must drink your health!"

The order was called at the foot of the staircase, up which Sandy had heard some one beating a hasty retreat. For a few minutes there was a good deal of shuffling of feet overhead, and then Jessie herself, his old friend and confidante, Jessie, stood before him with the bottle and glasses.

And Sandy, boor that he was, paid no attention to her after the first greeting. Certainly the room was very dark, and Jessie kept persistently in the darkest part of it. But he never turned his head towards her for more than a passing glance, and devoted his attention entirely to her grandfather. Was it possible that Alexander Gordon, who had been used to Mrs. Peregrine-Searle and her mates, felt shy before his old playmate?

Not exactly. But the change that had taken place in Jessie was so astonishing to him that he felt that, should he once allow his eyes to rest on her, he would not be able, in this particular room and under these particular circumstances, to keep himself from staring her out of countenance.

Not that Jessie Ross had become a beauty in the ordinary acceptance of the term. She had only—changed completely. In truth, she was simply a straight, well-built, dark-eyed,

---

wholesome, though pale-looking, Highland girl. Her greatest glory was indeed what her fellow-townsmen least appreciated: her hair, which waved back in ruddy-gold frizziness from a dead-white forehead. No artificial means were needed to compose that coiffure. The plain dark blue serge set off the trimness of the girl's figure. The one mistake in her attire was her attempt at adornment: a gaudy tartan ribbon fastened with a shabby enamelled brooch.

But it suddenly flashed across Sandy's memory, as he slowly walked homewards, that this very brooch was an old friend. He himself had given it to Jessie as a "Hogmanay," the New Year's Day before he had sailed.

---



## CHAPTER IV.

"Let me look over your list, mother," said Sandy, that evening, stifling a yawn.

He had come home to a room full of guests, sitting in an atmosphere redolent of hot-buttered scones, with the cake-baskets of his youthful Sabbaths filled with "tea-bread," *Anglice*—buns and small cakes. He had walked about, a cream-jug in one hand, and a plate of eatables in the other, wishing, oh, so heartily, that his deft-handed "boy" in Shanghai had been there to take his place. The rich furs and the perfume-laden handkerchiefs had given him a sickening sensation of suffocation. A lady's "day" is one on which all her male relatives should be out.

But they were gone at last, even to the stout old lady who had sat out every other visitor. Gone, after staying at least an hour apiece! And the two girls had betaken themselves to the little parlour in which they seemed to spend most of their lives, keeping the blinds solemnly lowered in the drawing-room except on state occasions.

It was very cheerless and very stiff, that drawing-room. A handsome gilt clock under a glass shade had stuck fast at six o'clock. Under other glass shades, or arranged four-square

on inlaid cabinets and tables, stood grandly-massive ornaments : candlesticks, mosaics, alabaster vases, all as certainly ticketed as to their comparative values by their settings as though the shop-labels were still attached to them. Sandy's own contribution of curios matched with amazing harmony. There stood a magnificent specimen of Ningpo carving, here three huge blue "Ming" ginger-jars, and yonder a set of Cantonese carved solid ivory chessmen. He had sent no more ; but Sandy had spent on his few gifts a sum worthy of this drawing-room.

Just now all this barbaric display of wealth without taste jarred on him. Perhaps it was because he was tired, perhaps he had a touch of malarial fever from the damp, perhaps his mother's new friends—he knew not a soul of the company he had stumbled upon—were slightly heavy, or perhaps the visit to the old house had stirred him more than he knew himself. Whatever the reason, he felt weary and, strange to say, he felt lonely also. So, as his mother, evidently loth to leave him to himself, and yet longing to be in the kitchen, from whence came an ominous smell of something burning,—as she hovered near the door, jangling in an exasperating way her bunch of keys, Sandy turned round in his armchair and asked for the list.

"Certainly, Alexander," Mrs. Gordon replied with alacrity. "Grace has it. I will tell her to bring it to you."

And she was about to make her escape when her son stopped her hurriedly.

"Don't go, mother. Come here and speak to me."

Mrs. Gordon gave a despairing sniff, and then came slowly towards the fire. She, too, wanted to speak with her boy, wanted it with the indescribable longing which training, and circumstances, and the blunting of the affections that comes from constant repression, can never crush out of a mother's heart. But what a pity that the talk should be at the expense of a burnt joint, of possibly smoked potatoes? . . .

Moreover, although he had asked her to come and talk to him, Sandy did not at first seem inclined to speak. He fidgetted at the bars of the grate with his boots—his father's old trick!—and bit furiously at his ill-grown moustache. Mrs. Gordon was on tenterhooks. In fact, she was about to make a desperate rush for the door when Sandy began, speaking quickly and with a crimson hue stealing up the back of his neck:—

“I have been to see the old place, mother.”

“No, no,” Mrs. Gordon broke in anxiously, as though denial of the deed done could undo it. “You didn't go there the very first day, did you, Sandy?”

Sandy took no notice of this interruption. He went on, looking straight into the fire:—

“The Rosses have gone down in the world, have they not? And the old story, is it? Strange that the old man should have taken to the whisky after he had seen what it did for his son!”

“I'm not the one to blame him, Sandy,” his mother put in eagerly. “No, nor your father either. He always said ‘Jimmy Ross is no man's enemy, but his own.’ 'T was your father who put him into our old house, and I've always told the girls that it won't be my hand that puts him out. Nor yours neither, Sandy, if only for old sake's sake.”

“Who thinks of turning him out?” Sandy asked vaguely. “There's not one of our family who would be so blackly ungrateful as to forget what we owe to them. But the lassie, mother, and the laddie Jock? Who has looked after them?”

Mrs. Gordon glanced warily at her son.

“Your father gave them both a good schooling—schools are alike for rich and poor in Giltown, you know. But Jock turned out a wild lad, and we were forced to send him to

South Africa. He was his father's son, poor lad ; and yet he was good at heart. I doubt me that even your father was sorry when we heard he was dead. But we could not keep him here, Sandy, and our Grace sees now we were right. She was sad for the lad for many a day, and I think it has damaged her a great deal. But your father aye stuck to it that it would not do, and Grace, I'll be sure, thinks the same now."

So even Grace, prim, dignified Grace, had had her own romance, her own little love-story ! Small wonder she had changed so utterly,—small wonder it seemed to Sandy to-night. To-morrow morning, after a sleep over it, and by the practical light of a grey Gilltown day, Sandy would scorn his own softness, and give his father right, a thousand times over. Grace to marry a drunkard, the son and the grandson of drunkards ! All the ethics of Gilltown, all the dogmas of sober, sensible, scientific mankind, cried out against such a crime. But at night, and when one is tired, things wear a gentler complexion . . . .

"Look," Mrs. Gordon went on eagerly, opening a massive photograph book. "Here, Sandy, is the piece of white heather Jock gave her the last time they went up Ben Livat together. She found it lying away not a fortnight ago. 'Rubbish !' she said, and threw it down. I lifted it, Sandy, I could not help it. Clean forgotten, as a dead man out of mind !"

Sandy took the spray, and handled it mechanically. But his thoughts were not altogether occupied with the luckless Jock and the heartless Grace. Something else was troubling him, a question which he had been longing to ask all the evening. It came out now, aided by an introductory and portentous sniff:—

"Is Jessie Ross coming to the party, mother ?"

"Oh dear no," Mrs. Gordon answered, in a tone of flurried decisiveness. "Our girls don't know her any more.

She isn't in their set. She has to teach in the Board School to earn her living. Oh no, we don't know Jessie Ross any more !”

And fearful of prolonging the conversation, Mrs. Gordon gathered together her keys and her train, and fled. Not to the kitchen first, but to the parlour, where Grace and Maggie were engaged in tearing off the clean half-sheets from the piles of notes that covered the table.

“Sandy has asked if we have invited Jessie Ross. I am half sorry we haven't, girls, seeing—”

“Nonsense, mother,” said Grace decidedly. The Rosses are not in our set. If Alec says anything more about them to you, send him to me. I will tell him their history, and that will be quite sufficient.”

And with Grace's mouth set for fixed purpose, Mrs. Gordon did not venture to tell her daughter that she had already told that same history with fuller details than Grace was ever likely to give.

---

## CHAPTER V.

Sunday in Gilltown is most decidedly not a lively day. So the Gilltonians seem to think, at any rate; for they shorten it as much as possible. First, by getting up very late; secondly, by partaking of so heavy a meal in the middle of the day that a siesta of at least three hours' duration is necessary to "make the digestion;" and lastly, by brewing extra strong toddy and going to bed at an unmentionably early hour. Thus, clipped at both ends and compressed in the middle, the average Gilltonian finds his Sunday—just endurable.

But to Sandy Gordon, fresh to ponderous Sunday puddings, and awake and hungry in the morning hours before the household dreamt of stirring, Sunday was no day of joy and gladness. He had gone to church in the morning, this being a sign of respectability rather than of conviction in Gilltown, whose inhabitants, perhaps to display their orthodoxy, perchance their millinery, choose by preference those churches which are farthest removed from their dwellings. Thus did the Gordons; and Sandy had sat next his mother, whose pride in her son had showed itself in an embarrassing finding of places, loud whispering, and general officiousness. Not till the sermon

began, and Mrs. Gordon had composed herself for a nap, with her eyes solemnly turned on the preacher's face, did Sandy venture to look about him.

And there she sat, in a side-seat half under the gallery, in that section devoted to "free" sittings, and therefore the worst, the most uncomfortable, the lowliest in that church,—Jessie Ross, with the same blue serge gown half covered with a cheap jacket, her glorious hair shining from under *such* an old and shabby hat! But Sandy noticed none of these details, noticed nothing but the face.

For Jessie's eyes were fixed on him in such an eager gaze, with such an utter disregard of all the rules that denounce staring, that Sandy could not have gone away without seeing her. Her eyes had compelled him to look, and having once looked, they prevented him from turning away again.

And yet the look in Jessie's eyes was not all, scarcely at all, one of admiration. This Sandy perceived at once. Nor was she "making eyes" at him. Indeed, after the first few moments Sandy began to doubt whether she saw him after all. For she did not blush, nor drop her eyes, nor give any sign of recognition. She seemed gazing into him, through him, beyond him. . .

A hard cough in the pew beside him broke the spell. Grace had turned round, and was deliberately following her brother's eyes. Suddenly Jessie's pale face flamed like a Gilltown sunset after a rainy day. And Sandy, turning to seek the cause of such an effect, saw Grace's mouth drawn down in its most contemptuous manner, and her eyeglasses slowly drop to their accustomed resting-place on her muff.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was a silent, uncomfortable party that gathered round the Gordon table for the Sunday early dinner. There was something wrong with Sandy, and something wrong with Grace, and between the two poor Mrs. Gordon felt a guilty

chill, partly caused by Grace's sharp and east-wind tone of voice, partly the result of reaction from the excitement she had laboured under in church. Had she, after all, displeased Sandy, made too great a fuss over him? Was anything wrong with the joint? Could she have forgotten her boy's favourite morsels? For there sat Sandy, sulky and taciturn. His plate went away almost untouched, he frowned a refusal of the pudding, and shook his head impatiently over the almonds and raisins. And finally, without inviting any one to accompany him, he rose abruptly from the table and announced that he was going for a walk.

"What is the matter, Grace?" asked Maggie before the door was wellnigh shut.

"Only that I caught Jessie Ross making eyes at him in church, and he saw me frowning—"

"He saw you, did he, Grace? And this is why he is so angry? I do not think it kind of you, Grace, to anger him about that lassie. After all, we owe everything we have to her family."

Grace had risen while her mother was speaking, and was standing with her back to the table.

"Jessie Ross shall not marry Sandy as long as I can prevent it," she said in a harsh voice. "You have surely forgotten their family story, have you not? They have been our curse in the past; we are done with them now!"

"She'll just drive him into it with her pride," grumbled Maggie, as Grace was heard moving about overhead. "She couldn't marry herself, and now she won't allow any one else to be happy!"

There was a tinge of regret in Maggie's voice that alarmed old Mrs. Gordon into instant dignity.

"Grace is right, Maggie," she said. "We owe it to your father to keep to ourselves,—though it is sore enough sometimes, God knows!"



## CHAPTER VI.

Along the neatly clipped hedges of suburban villas ; up the road, black with Sunday crawlers, that led from the town into the country ; then across the lanes that dipped down towards the river, Sandy sauntered moodily that Sunday afternoon.

He was very offended with Grace, and justly so. Was he, after all these years of independence, to come back to be ordered, and spied upon, and controlled as of yore by this same Grace ? She was welcome to rule his mother, or his sister ; but himself ? No, a thousand times no ! He would be friends with whom he chose ; he would do more, he would champion those oppressed by Grace's "overweening conceit." It is to be feared that Sandy made mental use of adjectives far stronger than are to be found in school dictionaries. But the occasion justified "Shakespearean" language. He would get the better of Grace in this very matter too ! The more he thought about it, the more resolute he became that Jessie Ross should appear at the *Conversazione*—just in order to spite Grace.

"Mr. Gordon ! what merciful Providence dropped you down here to-day !"

Sandy's start was one of surprise rather than of pleasure. And yet here was the very woman he had been so anxious to

find, so concerned lest he should not meet, standing straight in front of him, leaning over the gate that led down a winding avenue to one of those old-fashioned, damp-mildewed, but eminently aristocratic houses which are the abodes of ancient county-families.

Sandy knew the house quite well. Therein dwelt Sir James Johnson, a rake whom old age and money difficulties had reformed long years ago. The Johnsons of Saltwells,—all Gilltown knew them, and respected their shamblly paintless waggonette, their hungry splendour, their penniless lasses with long pedigrees. And here was Mrs. Peregrine-Searle with them, Mrs. Peregrine-Searle who had been accustomed to the best of everything, whose table had ceaselessly flowed with champagne, whose house-bills and dress-bills must have totalled up in a very few months to more than the six Miss Johnsons could ever hope to possess in their whole long lives!

For a moment Sandy was quite too staggered to answer Mrs. Peregrine-Searle's greeting. Then he recovered himself, took off his hat (why did that simple action cost him an effort in her presence?), and stammered out a few words.

"You are wondering why I am here," she said in a gracious voice. "Old Sir James is my husband's uncle, and as I wanted to come to Scotland I wrote and invited myself. I was wishing just now I hadn't,—and I verily believe you are wishing the same! I saw you coming down in the train (of course, you remember), and I watched you being embraced at the station. You didn't look, and you don't look, as though you were enjoying yourself!"

Sandy felt himself colouring up. He put on his hat again, and gave a dignified sniff of displeasure. Mrs. Peregrine-Searle had not changed for the better, it appeared. Perhaps it would be safer not to invite her after all—

A hand covered with rings of shining sapphires and diamonds was gently but firmly laid on his. The Chinese twisted gold cable slid down her wrist and struck him over the knuckles.

"Mr. Gordon, please, as a favour, come inside and walk about with me. I have longed so much to see a China face, to be natural again, if only for five minutes. It is so deadly dull here; they are all so good! And to-day I feel fit for suicide. And I can see you feel as I do. Come, there's a kind man!"

Marvellous! A big drop fell on the hand that was now tightly clutched. And Sandy, looking up amazed, perceived a second drop slowly running down Mrs. Peregrine-Searle's cheek. He silently moved inside the gate.

"I didn't mean to say anything unkind just now," she said apologetically, actually drawing out her handkerchief. "Goodness knows I envied you enough, coming home to your own people and to a welcome. While I—ah! may you never—"

Sandy felt uncomfortable and perplexed. He sent a pebble flying with his stick, and sniffed sympathetically.

"I was so glad to see you coming just now," she went on. "I could have fallen on your neck and embraced you. To see a China face; to be reminded of the dear old days! I think I could welcome my bitterest foe—not that you are one! Tell me, Mr. Gordon, don't you find that no one understands you in this country? Are you not possessed with a wild desire to do something to shock somebody? To give just a tiny "swear" as you are passing some one extra solemn, for the pleasure of seeing that some one jump! I am always shocking my uncle and my cousins. I simply can't help it. I don't know that I say or do anything strange; but *how* they look at me! How glad I am I saw you! You won't forsake me now, will you? Spend the afternoon with me, and let us help each other to get through this interminable day."

Interminable did it prove to Sandy after all? It seemed to him that that Sunday came to an end all too soon. For after they had walked for an hour, talking on subjects barred in Gilltown households on the Sabbath—at least in Sandy's home and at Saltwells House, Mrs. Peregrine-Searle insisted on taking him indoors and introducing him to the Laird. And Sir James Johnson had shaken hands with him, with Sandy, the whilom artisan's son, and the eldest Miss Johnson had poured out execrable tea into a cup of the finest porcelain, and the youngest Miss Johnson had brought him musty morsels of cake and microscopic slices of bread and butter. After this there was of course no reason for Sandy to stay; indeed, his mother was probably anxiously awaiting his return. But Sir James courteously invited him to come again; and Mrs. Peregrine-Searle, who, to her cousins' scandalisation, walked up the avenue with him, announced her intention of making his mother's acquaintance.

"And thank you for your kindness, Mr. Gordon."

What kindness? Sandy vaguely wondered. He felt his canny Scotch head slightly turned, and now that he was well on his way home, in a drizzling Scotch mist, he resented the feeling. Yet, try as he might, he could no longer think of Mrs. Peregrine-Searle with the rancour he had formerly borne her. They two had something in common, if no more than the fact that they were fellow-exiles, extras, encumbrances, in the lives of other folk who had no place for them, and who, though they might welcome the coming, undoubtedly would speed the parting guests. Home for Sandy meant no longer El Dorado, Elysium, an ideal Gilltown, but Grace, and Sunday dinners, an eternally grey sky, and a spying-out of his every action, look and word. And for Mrs. Peregrine-Searle? Why, there was no home for her, only a literal craving for and dependence on the crumbs from another's




table. Poor Mrs. Peregrine-Searle! Was she often hungry at Saltwells?

It was no longer to triumph over her, but with a satisfaction that was absolutely unselfish, that Sandy Gordon bade his mother send an invitation for the great *Conversazione* to Mrs. Peregrine-Searle, after a due warning to have the drawing-room in constant readiness for her expected visit.

But Grace's look of quiet triumph irritated him into this rider:

"I will have Jessie Ross invited too, mother. No one shall say of us that we turned our backs upon our old friends when we fell in with the Johnsons of Saltwells. Write Miss Ross an invitation, and send her a liberal cheque for her dress. If I don't find this done within twenty-four hours, I shall do it myself!"

And thus ended the interminable day.

---

## CHAPTER VII.

The fortnight that intervened between the first Sunday at home and the great *Conversazione* passed for Sandy in a most perplexing whirl.

The many invitations he received, the welcome he got when, quite by himself, he wandered about his old haunts, the respectful way in which the city magnates listened to him, the honour which, unprophetlike, he was accorded in his own country,—these things, delightful as they were, would have left him philosophically calm had he been in his usual frame of mind. True, he put on the semblance of preferring the society of his old acquaintances with a greater zest because he could see how Grace disapproved of his “low” tastes, and how she resented his refusal to be drawn into the select circle of her female intimates. But the satisfaction of demonstrating to Grace that she had absolutely no control over him was not sufficient explanation.

If Sandy had had the courage to examine his own feelings, he would have discovered that his perplexity arose from the fact that he alternated daily between two extremes—the one being the pleasure he derived from the society of Jessie Ross, the other the satisfaction of feeling that he was the man distinguished by the regard of Mrs. Peregrine-Searle. Either extreme

brought with it a disturbance of the balance of his mind. When Grace turned up her nose at the Rosses, Sandy felt a desire to scorch her up for ever by announcing his intention of marrying Jessie. His intention;—there would be no courting, no anxious uncertainty in the matter. But again when, after that for-many-days-delayed visit from Mrs. Peregrine-Searle, Sandy came home to find his mother quite flurried, with her cap all awry, and Grace in such a state of abject humility that with her he might easily have “swept the floor,”—then the hard, worldly side of Sandy’s nature, that hardness which had gained for him the position he now held, reasserted itself. He felt he was born for better things than a marriage beneath him. What a social standing would not a Mrs. Peregrine-Searle as wife guarantee him! And then the face of Jessie, pretty, timid Jessie, who had no notion of how to enter a drawing-room, far less of conversing when once inside it, faded out as the primrose pales beside the beautiful perfume-breathing hyacinth of the hothouse.

On Saturdays then, at tea with old Ross and his granddaughter, Sandy was amply but simply contented. The years spent in the gorgeous East, the bright colours, the luxurious life, were wiped as clean out of his memory as though they had never existed. But on Sundays, morning now as well as afternoon, lazily lying at Mrs. Peregrine-Searle’s feet on the big rug before the study fire, or walking with her and talking in the unconstrained manner born of common experiences, carefully clearing the way for her silk-lined skirts, or drinking tea with the Laird, who politely made the self-same enquiries about eastern customs every time he saw Sandy,—then Jessie Ross, and the dingy house near the harbour, and the days of the plaid brooch and of his little sweetheart, became unreal as a fairy-tale, as a previous state of existence, as a dream out of which he had long ago awakened.

And his mother and sisters, watching his expression as he came home day by day, waited in anxious suspense as to how it would all end. To his mother, either choice must bring sorrow. But better, far better, Jessie Ross, with all the possible chances of an inherited taint, with her poverty, her ignorance of the world, than this Mrs. Peregrine-Searle. Better Grace's wrath than that woman's sneer! With Jessie, she might perchance lose Grace, but never her son. With Mrs. Peregrine-Searle, Sandy was gone from her eyes for ever.

Whatever Grace thought of the new acquaintance, she wisely kept all comments to herself. And so the great *Conversazione* loomed nearer and nearer, until Sandy, waking up one fine morning, found that the day had actually arrived, the day on which, as he had been lately telling himself, he was to finally make up his mind.

The house was full of workmen, draping with flimsy art-muslins the handsome carvings and great staircase. Ladders and housemaids' steps confronted him at every turn. He ate his breakfast in a small china-cupboard, and then, to the evident delight of his womankind, betook himself down the town for an indefinite period.

Before the largest flower-shop he paused, and began to examine critically the bouquets displayed in the windows. Sandy Gordon before a flower-shop! How times were changed! Ten years ago it would have been an optician's, fifteen years ago a "tuck" shop. And now, here was Sandy designing, and ordering, and watching grow up before his eyes the most expensive bouquet procurable, to be sent by special messenger to Mrs. Peregrine-Searle.

But when the bouquet was dispatched, he still lingered about the shop. Lingered in the doorway, blocking up the entrance, heedless of the frowns or shoves of would-be



purchasers. Then he came shyly back to the counter, and asked the liveliest, brightest-cheeked, merriest of the shop-maidens:—

“Have you got a sprig of white heather?”

The girl stole a glance of mischief from under her long lashes.

“Surely you remember, Mr. Gordon, that it is only pressed white heather you can get in Gilltown this time of year! We have none, but maybe they will have some at your home.”

Have some? Sandy shuddered at the thought of the home “some.” But the girl was watching him; so he turned away and took up a cluster of glorious brown and gold chrysanthemums.

“Shall I send these to your address, sir?”

“I will take them myself, thank you.”

Coming home from the side street that led down to the harbour Sandy stopped, and fumbled for his pocket-book. In it lay Grace’s rejected white heather. But when the wind whirled away the faded ribbon, the true lover’s knot which death had untied, Sandy still held the sprig itself. He had cut away the past; the future should decide itself for him that very night.

\* \* \* \* \*

If Mrs. Peregrine-Searle was guilty of an unpardonable breach of Gilltonian etiquette in arriving an hour-and-a-half later than she was invited, the splendour of her entrance went a long way towards condoning the crime. She at once took her place as queen of the room, and the Universe, of which Gilltown is the hub, straightway fell down and worshipped her. In her hand she carried a magnificent bouquet, in her hair glittered shining diamond stars, and by her side hung a fan of exquisitely carved ivory. She had put off all mourning, and

wore a golden-yellow satin brocade, the finest that Shanghai could produce. Possibly her raiment may have cost less than many others in the room. But whereas the worthiest Giltown matron never seemed to lose the consciousness of her own splendour, never rose above being a clothes-peg, in Mrs. Peregrine-Searle's case the personality of the wearer was never for a moment lost sight of. Her clothes were a part of herself; she created them, not they her.

But while the people around stared in open-eyed, speechless wonder, the scales suddenly fell from Sandy Gordon's eyes, and the glamour she had been weaving over him melted away for ever. One glance at her had sufficed to bring back a multitude of bitter recollections. Those stars in her hair . . . . had meant to one of her old admirers the first step to embezzlement, forgery, a wrecked career. The fan was the price paid by a miserable husband for a humiliating silence, scarcely kept; the brocade meant the brazen risking of a good name; the golden ropes stood for the tortures of jealousy to a young bride. And Sandy, Sandy himself, was he not there? It was a great mistake, Mrs. Peregrine-Searle, to have pinned on that sparkling butterfly. That stood for your hospitality to the young Scotchman; but what had that hospitality been, after all? A debt to be paid off, an experience, the anguish of which could never be wholly forgotten. And he had been such a fool as nearly, very very nearly, to run his head into the collar again!

And thus, though Mrs. Peregrine-Searle held her high court in his home, and men and women flocked around her, and Grace was content to kiss the hem of her garment, Sandy did not join the circle. When, indeed, Mrs. Peregrine-Searle caught sight of him, he was sitting in a window corner, bending over a girl in a simple white dress, in whose hands he was

laying something—a weed it seemed—which he had just drawn out of his pocket-book.

“And so you thought I had changed, dearie? Maybe that I had forgotten you, or was going away to forget you? We Giltown folk never do forget. If it’s once, it’s for always, Jessie.”

Sandy spoke hurriedly, almost fearfully. He felt only too conscious of the narrowness of his escape from the “*Might Have Been*.” Then, drawing Jessie’s hand within his arm, he boldly faced the world with :—

“Mrs. Peregrine-Searle, I would like to introduce you to my future wife, Miss Jessie Ross.”



No. 6.

PETER WONG

*A CHINA COAST TALE*

BY

LISE BOEHM.



# PETER WONG.

## CHAPTER I.

終遠兄弟 *Parted for ever from my peers.* . . .

IT was of no use fighting against circumstances any longer. Here he was, planted down in Chingcha\*, with the prospect of passing a good many years of his life there. The question was: how could he make those years pass most agreeably?

That he was in Chingcha was, of course, a crying sin and shame. Gregory King had always lived in Shanghai, and he liked living there. He was a sociable man, a pleasant companion, and a very second-class man of business. He could sing a little, paint a little, and talk scandal unlimitedly. No longer a young man, he was still thoroughly "well-preserved." By which he it understood that he did not yet avoid any deadly dishes, but ate nuts freely, even cracking them with his very own teeth. Perhaps he was a trifle bald, but of course that is not necessarily a sign of age. At any rate, he had not yet given up being scrupulously particular about his personal appearance.

How came it he was sent to Chingcha? This was a nine days' wonder in Shanghai, and the story of his

---

\* *Note.*—For exact geographical position, see PLAYFAIR'S *Cities and Towns of China*, No. 9,038.

banishment has not yet been satisfactorily settled. The *taipan* of his firm, Messrs. White and Smith, the well-known shipping and general agents, must have known. But he was a surly Scotchman, who never relaxed, even over a St. Andrew's dinner. Gregory King himself, though not quite as astonished as he was expected to be, declared solemnly he did not know. He had never, to any marked extent, broken the ten commandments. He had often declared himself incapable of falling in love. Was it jealousy of his brilliant social successes? History has never cleared up this point. But Gregory King was sent to Chingcha, and told he had better make up his mind to stay there for the next three or four years.

And his friends, who accompanied him to the steamer and saw him off, said it was an abominable shame, and muttered a good deal about seeing things put right before long. Then they went back home, and forgot straightway all about Gregory King.

It was perhaps a trifle difficult to keep his temper in face of the exulting joy of the man he had come to relieve. Such a shabbily dressed man, with no soul above his whisky and soda, who had let the house go to rack and ruin, and could not see decay and spiders, though both stared him full in the face. This poor ghost had not stirred outside his compound for six months at least, had been laid up with fever scores of times without any one to nurse him, and pitied Gregory King exceedingly. This was intensely exasperating. But solitude soon calmed Gregory's spirit. After three days of incessant rain and utter loneliness he resolved to brave the elements and call upon the community of Chingcha.

Anyone who has visited this moribund port knows that the river which winds through the place cuts the foreign

community completely in two. On the one side, where the Shanghai steamers lie, are old decayed foreign hong's, once gay and hospitable, now falling to pieces, or tenanted by Chinese. In Gregory King's days the only buildings still occupied by foreigners were the Custom's offices, presided over by an assistant-in-charge, and the British Consulate, where dwelt another assistant-in-charge, when he was not up-country shooting, or in the Club at Shanghai. These two were Gregory King's only near neighbours. They were also the only laymen in the place, if he excepted some half-dozen tide-waiters. All the rest of the foreigners were missionaries, and they lived on the other side of the water, where rose the city walls of Chingcha proper.

Now every one is aware, not only that the Chinese are heathens, but that a great many and various religious parties, not to say Churches, are trying to Christianise them. These missionaries are mostly confined to three nationalities : British, American, and French, and they were all represented at Chingcha, in very numerous sects. At least so Gregory King gathered from the Directory, where nine-tenths of the names in the very short entry for the port were ranged under various Missions. And it was from this same Directory that Gregory King gathered that, if he did not want to go the way of his predecessor, he must make friends with the missionaries.

The Acting Consul was out, and the Acting Commissioner just going out, when Gregory King paid them his duty calls. The Commissioner was a Russian Jew, well-known all up and down the coast of China for excessive carefulness and frugality in expenditure. But though he was notoriously unsociable, he might reasonably be expected to furnish information respecting the other members of the community, and Gregory accordingly made his enquiries.



“There are a great many ladies among the missionaries,” he was told, “and of course they are all charming (with the slightest perceptible sneer). But if you want to make friends with them, you had better begin by calling at Dr. Mackenzie’s Mission. He is the doctor, the only one we have in the place, and lives with his cousins, a Mr. and Mrs. Brown, and their family. Good-bye. You will easily find the house: the only red brick one along the river bank.”

And the Commissioner escaped, feeling he had lost quite ten minutes out of his walking time, which disturbed the even tenor of his mind for the rest of the day.

Shrugging his shoulders, so as to mentally shake off the inhospitable dust of the Customs’ premises, Gregory King drew on his gloves, and went forth to pay his calls on the other side of the river.

Pleasant indeed to look upon, even on a cloudy November day, with a north-easter blowing in his teeth, was the missionary settlement of Chingcha. All along the river bank, a little way outside the city wall, which formed an almost romantic background, were dotted well-built shadily verandahed houses, facing due south, and securely sheltered from the cold winds. In front of these substantial roomy houses, gardens, well-stocked and carefully cultivated, sloped towards the river, where trim little jetties or garden steps gave easy access to the water. At the back of the houses, following the line of the city wall, ran a wide path. And a little higher up, at a bend of the river, stood the only red brick house, the one which Gregory King was to visit first.

Certainly the trip across in the ferry was chilly enough, but it was not long, and Mr. King soon found himself under the shelter of the city wall, able to look about him without having to hold on his hat. The path, too, was not a solitary

one. Every now and then a Chinaman passed, perhaps conversing in an elevated key to a companion some eight or ten yards behind. And, surely that was a foreign figure! Gregory quickened his pace until he got almost on a level with a young couple who were sauntering slowly along.

No, the man was a Chinaman, dressed in foreign clothes; Gregory ought to have known him a long way off, by his heavy clumsy build. Unmistakably a native, witness even the thick coarse hair, which covered what of his head could be seen under an English clerical hat. No amount of European dressing or culture could ever conceal the birth of this young fellow. Perhaps his clothes rather showed off how truly Asiatic he was.

But his companion, a young girl of about twenty, was just as unmistakably European. The hair was of that warm brown colour vulgarly called auburn. Not red, but that burnished brown which is associated with the name of Burne-Jones. Of course Gregory King could not as yet see her face. But he groaned in spirit and was exceedingly troubled, not to say mentally hurt, at the garments in which this lady was arrayed. It was not only that they were of an atrocious colour, make and material (a staring red and black plaid skirt surmounted by a black cloth jacket trimmed with rusty satin), but that the skirt was hopelessly crooked and hung uneven, the coat was unbrushed, and the young lady's hair seemed on the point of descending, requiring constant support from hands encased in yellow cotton gloves. And yet her figure was pretty enough, her step firm and light, and her face, which she now half turned towards Gregory, was absolutely a pleasing one!

Here, however, was the gate of the red brick house. The young couple passed out of sight round the corner of the city wall.

## CHAPTER II.

天生此一人而一世事姑能辦也 *When God made man,  
He gave him powers to cope with the exigencies of his  
environment. . . .*

Had any one, in his Shanghai days, told Gregory King he could ever be as comfortable in Chingcha as he found himself half-an-hour later, he would have laughed him to scorn.

But in that half-hour he had undergone some afflictions. First, he had been made to wait nearly ten minutes outside the gate, getting chilled through, and endangering that delicate tenor voice which was his joy and pride. Then, when admitted inside the door, he had been shown into a damp and icy state-room, where his teeth had chattered, and his artistic eye had smarted by reason of sundry crude and terrible tapestries, woolworks, and other atrocities with which this chamber of horrors was decorated. But into it had come a veritable angel of deliverance, though she was neither young nor beautiful. For Mrs. Brown was a most cheery, cordial, buxom little lady, and when she came bustling in Gregory King felt his evil quarter-of-an-hour was over.

Yes, it was wretchedly cold, and the stupid coolie had forgotten to light the fire! Would Mr. King—she scarcely

liked to ask him—come into her working-room? She had just dismissed a women's class; that was how he had been kept waiting. There was nobody but herself to do woman's mission work! Dear Maggie was of so little use, and dear Papa so full of his Chinese studies, and—"thank you, Mr. King, yes, the second door, and you'll excuse the untidiness of the room!"

Certainly he would have, and much more than he was asked to excuse, in view of that lovely fire, and the two ancient and very soft armchairs drawn up on either side. Mrs. Brown insisted on his taking one, carried off his hat and stick, rang the bell and ordered tea: in short, succeeded in making herself charming. What man, even the greatest and noblest, is above being petted and waited upon? Gregory King fairly basked in this sunshine. Of course it was his due, and what he had always been accustomed to. But was it not after all something to be wondered at, in this Bœotia? Why had he never before cultivated missionary society? Was it possible that there were other Mrs. Browns in Chingcha, who gave him comfortable armchairs, poured him out tea without saying any grace over it, and delicately insinuated how flattered she was by his visit? Gregory felt quite sorry when a banging of the outside door and a tread of heavy footsteps along the passage, was followed by the entrance of Mr. Brown himself.

Here was a typical missionary, Gregory thought with a mental sneer. Tall, thin, with lank faded brown hair, long and untidy whiskers, a mouth drawn down at the corners, and restless little green eyes set close to the nose—here was a Stiggins, if ever there was one. That mouth with its thin lips, opening over very inferior artificial teeth, looked, to Mr. King's eyes, as though it could relish "a drop" in secret. But of course he was wrong, for Mr. Brown was in reality a great Temperance man. Still, it must be admitted that the visitor did not feel drawn to him, and was, in fact, just about to take

his leave (he had only sat by the fire for half-an-hour before the Rev. Samuel Brown appeared) when the door once more opened, and the young couple he had seen walking outside came in.

Not in the order usually followed in polite society. The young Chinaman lounged in first, leaving the door half open for his companion. He looked shy and sulky on being confronted with the stranger. Gregory's manner, too, was not calculated to put him at his ease. He nodded to the young man, who was rather nervously introduced as "Mr. Wong," most superciliously, and then fixed his eyes with intense curiosity on the girl who had followed him into the room.

Perhaps it was not polite of him to stare so at her, but he was a man of the world, and as such did not waste his manners where they were not required. For in that half-hour's talk with Mrs. Brown he had found out that "Maggie" was her stepdaughter; and the order of arrival in the room had shewn him of how little consequence "Maggie" was in the household. And yet she was a pretty girl, to an artist such as Gregory King imagined himself to be. That red-brown hair and eyes, that pale waxy complexion—she might almost have stepped out of a Grosvenor Gallery frame! But to a Chinaman, to an ordinary unæsthetic Englishman, to a Philistine in short, Maggie Brown must have seemed plain. Nothing striking in the way of features, nothing that did not require fitting dress and background. And for dress, she had not even the benefit of tidiness, while for background and setting there was the homely, hideous missionary room. Who but Gregory King would have seen she was worth looking at twice?

The first looking at, however, had been enough to make Maggie feel uncomfortable. Her hand was hot and moist when Gregory took hold of it in the introduction, and she retreated to a more secluded part of the room while he made his farewell. Mr. and Mrs. Brown both accompanied him to

the gate, the little woman smiling gaily at him round the severe husband's elbow. As he passed the sitting-room window he saw the scowling face of Mr. Wong. Then the gate banged behind him, and he set his face towards his solitary home.

One figure passed him on the city side of the river. It was a tall gaunt Englishman, wrapped in a great cloak, with a very ancient sun hat and long grey beard.

"The doctor!" thought Gregory King, and rightly. For he, Dr. Mackenzie, was a man of whom even Shanghai knew, and whose portrait had graced more than one local journal. He was a missionary doctor, full of zeal and (some said) madness, who had been the hero of some great riots a couple of years ago. Chingcha could not hold more than one such light, and no one but a great light, or a great maniac, would go about in such guise in November.

When Gregory King turned to have another look at the strange figure, he found the doctor had halted, and was looking after him also. But, as though ashamed of having been found guilty of such curiosity, Dr. Mackenzie did not return Gregory's salutation, only fled towards the red house.

"A queer lot," Gregory mused to himself as he crossed in the ferry. "But I don't see where anything better is to come from. The mother is larky, and the girl worth studying. If only she didn't dress so vilely!"

Near home he met the Commissioner, who having walked himself into a good temper, greeted him with what was meant to be a winning smile.

"Ah, you have called upon the beautiful and accomplished Madame Brown? Quite charming, is she not? And Miss Maggie, and her *fiancé*, you saw them too?"

"*Fiancé*! What do you mean?" asked Gregory. A flash of what the Commissioner was going to say revealed to him in one instant the curious household he had just quitted.

"He? Monsieur Wong I think they call him. Did you not see him?"

"But, Commissioner, you don't mean to say—Damn the man!" Gregory King added to himself, as the Commissioner walked briskly off without even wishing him "Good evening."

"Well, there is no accounting for tastes," Gregory King said to himself as he sat down to his lonely dinner that evening. But it was not the taste in crockery of his predecessor that he was execrating.

---

## CHAPTER III.

取妻如何匪媒不得 *In marrying a wife how do we proceed?*  
*Without a go-between it may not be done. . . .*

Maggie Brown's taste still puzzled him that day two months.

During those two months Gregory King had become, if not reconciled to Chingcha, at any rate quite accustomed to its society. Now this involved some slight self-sacrifice on his part, and would have occasioned a little astonishment, not to say mirth, to his old acquaintance in Shanghai. For, if not an infidel, Gregory King was at any rate one of those who behind the term "Agnostic" so often shelter a hazy poetic unbelief which saves them the trouble of going to church, or subscribing to charities—in short, making themselves generally uncomfortable in this world without the prospect of any definite return in the next. But in Chingcha Agnosticism and Atheism were one and the same; and so Gregory King, with the good breeding of a thorough man of the world, kept his religious opinions to himself.

His family had always belonged to the Church of England, he told Mr. Brown, whose family having been artisans were always spoken of as "in business." But as the Church of



England missionaries in Chingcha had long ago given up trying to convert their fellow-countrymen, Mr. King took to patronising the Presbyterian service, where, in an ugly little chapel every Sunday afternoon, either Mr. Brown or Mr. Wong discoursed to a very small remnant, often consisting of only Mrs. and Miss Brown and Gregory. The last, it is to be feared, did not listen with the same attention to Mr. Wong as he vouchsafed to Mr. Brown. But of course that was the preacher's fault.

For, as he plaintively told Mr. Brown on one of the few occasions in which he found that excellent gentleman in solitary possession of the house, never until now had any one taken any pains to interest him, Gregory King, in missionary work. Doubtless the clergy of Shanghai were very earnest men, and their work amply blessed, but they were not of the stamp to influence men. They were, to speak candidly, only fit for ladies' classes and Bible readings. Never till now had Gregory felt that there might be something in life worth living for beyond taels, dollars, and cents. To all of which Mr. Brown listened with what he would have called in a missionary report "devout thankfulness." And he commissioned his wife, who was nothing loth herself, to be very kind and friendly to this most intelligent young man, and rebuked Mr. Wong more than once for reminding him that he had preached twice out of his turn in the little English chapel.

No, Gregory King was simply dull, not insincere. The society of his fellow-creatures was necessary to him. And then he was annoyed and irritated by an opposition there was to him. Annoyed, because it was kept up by beings so infinitely inferior to him; irritated, because it centred around the only interesting person in the place.

Of course this person was Maggie Brown. But, though she might be interesting to a Gregory King, it was certain,

astonishing though it was to this outsider, that Mr. Peter Wong rather considered he had honoured her by choosing her as his wife. This discovery was far more amazing than that her stepmother thought her plain, for after all looks are greatly modified or set off by dress. And Maggie was so shockingly untidy, dreamy, unpractical, everything calculated to irritate the commonplace stepmother! Still, what glorious tints would come out in her hair, if only it was fastened up securely, and the jeopardy of the hairpins did not so wholly absorb Gregory's attention! And why, oh why, would she wear the hideous tartan, and why did she wear those dreadful cotton gloves? Such shapely hands, so chapped and freckled! But even in that state they were more pleasant to look at than Mrs. Brown's podgy sausage fingers.

Peter Wong's opposition was, naturally, beneath Mr. King's notice. Who can feel anything but amused at the hostility of, say, the cat of a house? Further, Mr. Wong's dislike of Mr. King was distinctly disapproved of by Mr. and Mrs. Brown. They felt just a trifle embarrassed by the innocent assurance with which Peter dropped into the most comfortable armchair, a trifle vexed that he did not realise it was his duty to wait on the ladies at tea-time, open doors for them, and avoid certain topics of conversation in their presence. Up to the time of Gregory King's arrival the Brown family had looked upon Mr. Wong as a genuinely good, intelligent young fellow, "quite good enough for poor Maggie"—quite good enough to take to England with them as a show-specimen on their next holiday. How interesting the old ladies would find him! How subscriptions to the Mission would flow in, and how much more room there would be in the house for the two little step-sisters now at school. Mrs. Brown herself could make nothing of Maggie. Perhaps she was not exactly suited to be Peter Wong's wife, but are not

most marriages made between unsuitable people? And do they generally turn out so badly after all?

Mrs. Brown firmly believed that marriages are made in heaven. That this might account for so many turning out badly on earth had never suggested itself to her. Had she not herself been married by photograph, without ever having seen her husband, much less known him? And was she not a living proof of the success of such marriages? By the aid of such feminine logic she arrived at the conclusion that she was doing her duty by Maggie, an unthankful and deceitful girl, in sanctioning her engagement. Nevertheless, even she had had secret misgivings of late as to whether this distinct descent in the social scale for her step-daughter did not implicate and lower the whole Brown family also.

But Gregory King's greatest opponent, the one who most resented his introduction into the family life, was not Peter Wong, nor Maggie Brown,—indeed, she could scarcely be reckoned as an enemy—but the doctor: Neil Mackenzie. And the doctor, as he was universally styled, though innocent of any degree, and unacknowledged by any university, British or American, was a great power in the Mission and in Chingcha. He was an enthusiast in the most outrageous sense of the term, a man of iron will and *physique*, of boundless influence among the Chinese. A quack he undoubtedly was, a maniac many of the more sober-minded said, but no one denied he was honest, single-hearted, and devoted to his work. Whatever he undertook, from building a chapel with his own hands to forcing a nominal Christianity on a whole village, that he accomplished. His feats, of endurance or of strength, bordered on the miraculous. Naturally, however, this great "Apostle of Chingcha," as he was fondly styled by his Mission in England, had great faults as well as great virtues. He could not brook a rival, nor even an equal. And in consequence his fellow-

workers were always insignificant, second-rate men, against whom he railed for idleness and fondness of the loaves and fishes, but whom, it must be confessed, he would have hounded out of the Mission had they dared to attempt to follow in his footsteps to a martyr's glory. With an almost childish conceit he combined an equally childish simplicity, which made him an easy tool in the hands of his more clever Chinese converts. He distracted the Acting Consul, and very nearly drove him to delirium tremens, by taking up the most ridiculous convert squabbles. Thus, when a Christian Chinaman, having defrauded his heathen neighbour, was about to suffer punishment at the hands of the authorities, Dr. Mackenzie was the refuge of the distressed convert. And he, "as per Treaty," invariably insisted on the wretched representative of Her Majesty bearding Taotais and District Magistrates in utterly unlawful endeavours to go against native justice. The doctor was never so supremely happy as when the Consul was sullenly refusing to take up his cases, the Taotai was swearing, and he was writing or telegraphing to the Mission Committee in England to lay such and such a matter before the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

Now, for some inexplicable reason, Dr. Mackenzie was very fond of Peter Wong. The young man was certainly amiable enough, but slow and lazy to an appalling degree, which last perhaps may have been the quality most appreciated by the active, nervous doctor. It rested him, mentally, and served as a kind of opiate to his brain, to have a talk with, or rather to, Mr. Wong. There was a great deal of steam in Dr. Mackenzie which must find its escape through some safety-valve. Peter Wong was his valve. And on his side, Mr. Wong was more human, more responsive, more European so to speak, with Dr. Mackenzie than with any one else. It was to the doctor he had first confided his desire to marry an English girl, "like

Miss Maggie," and it was the doctor who had suddenly caught up the idea, not even formed in the young man's mind, that marry Maggie Brown he should. Vague dreams of a world-brotherhood cemented through the union of the Oriental with the Westerner had floated before his mind for many years, and now with a concrete instance ready to create, Dr. Mackenzie felt he could not hesitate. With a haste that utterly took away Mr. Wong's breath, and which somewhat amazed himself, he had planned and then precipitated this engagement. And now Peter Wong confided to him all his troubles, difficulties, fears and hopes, culminating in his dislike to Gregory King. And while Dr. Mackenzie blamed Peter for ungrounded prejudice, he himself was unconsciously influenced thereby. Perhaps Gregory's manner to him had not been quite as wise as it might have been, for Dr. Mackenzie was not above being conciliated.

But as yet Gregory King had only enjoyed the opposition of the doctor and Peter Wong. It gratified his self-conceit, for he would far rather they disliked him than that they ignored him. It would be much more amusing to win over the first—of course Peter Wong didn't count—than if the whole household had with one accord fallen on his neck and embraced him. And perhaps, who knew? he might not after all be kept so many years in Chingcha. He had plenty of good friends in Shanghai, and they would surely find him, Gregory, necessary to their enjoyment before long.

So when Mrs. Brown invited him to a birthday celebration in the middle of January, he accepted only provisionally. He was going for a run to Shanghai, and did not know whether he would be back in time.

"Why did you ask Mr. King, mother?" said Maggie, as soon as the gate had closed behind that gentleman.

"It is my table, Maggie, and not yours," answered

Mrs. Brown blandly. "Next year, when you are married, you will be able to ask any one you like—and they will be at liberty to refuse, if they like."

Mr. Wong laughed. He liked these references to next year. But Maggie didn't. Her face turned a shade whiter, with anger, and then she got up, went out of the room, upstairs into her own bedroom, and there walked up to the glass and looked at herself.

And then she drew from her pocket a little picture. It was only a chromo from a newspaper, but she handled it carefully, flattening it out, and comparing the face therein portrayed with her own in the glass.

The result was a satisfactory one. Maggie Brown evidently admired the picture, and by admiring the picture admired herself. For the two faces were wonderfully alike.

How had she come into possession of this picture?

It had chanced in this way. A few days before, Maggie had had a stormy interview with her stepmother over some neglected domestic mending. Maggie had forgotten all about this mending in the absorbing interest of a book taken on the sly from Dr. Mackenzie's library. For she was fond of books, in an altogether uneducated fashion, and whenever the doctor was away on one of his raids into the interior, Maggie would steal into his library, and lay secret hands on whatever intellectual food she could find there. In that room lay heaped up treatises on the burning questions of the day, pamphlets on Socialism, on Agnosticism, on Atheism, side by side with French novels in an English translation, a most miscellaneous collection, not always orthodox or even moral. Dr. Mackenzie deemed it his duty to have, if not to read, both sides, though probably his bags of teeth extracted from the jaws of suffering natives filled him with greater pride than his well stocked library. But Maggie read his books in secret and puzzled her

brain over them, and was convinced by the one side in theology, till a stronger argument threw her on to the opposite side. And all this she did without guidance, without telling any one. Surely she was a deceitful girl. And of course her person and her duties in the household were neglected, and Mrs. Brown was perfectly justified in finding fault with her.

Her summing up was, perhaps, undeserved.

"After all, Maggie, it mayn't be so much your fault. We all know your poor mother was hopelessly incapable, kept your father in misery, and was regretted by no one when she died."

What could Maggie do but dart a look of the most utter contempt at Mrs. Brown, and fling herself out of the house?

Luckily she had her coat and hat already on, and so she had the satisfaction of banging the front door immediately—a feat which has not the same effect on the person to be crushed if an interval of time has elapsed since the offence. Maggie walked to the ferry, crossed the river, and set out for a tramp along that desolate wind-swept piece of barren ground known in Chingcha as the Recreation Ground.

She was not likely to meet a soul there now. The Commissioner, the only man known to frequent it, and that on account of its loneliness, must be still safe in his office. Just three o'clock! Yes, there was the warning whistle of the steamer, the opposition one to Gregory King's firm, which ran on alternate days, and was now about to leave for Shanghai.

Often before Maggie had walked herself calm on the Recreation Ground, and gone home to smile on Peter Wong as the being who would deliver her from the unpleasantnesses of her present life. But she was not going to have solitude now. A foreigner was coming round the bend, near the broken wall that marked the ruin of what had once been intended for the Public Flower Garden. It was Gregory King.

"Good afternoon, Miss Brown," he said, gallantly taking off his hat, and turning round to walk with her in the style of an old acquaintance. "Why are you walking here by yourself?"

And when shy Maggie made no reply he looked curiously, but with obviously meant kindness, into her troubled face.

"Why, what's the matter? Has anybody been scolding you? What a horrid shame!"

How could Mr. King see she was in trouble? Maggie's astonishment at this prevented her making any reply.

"That stupid fool of a Wong doesn't know how to take care of you. None of them do," went on Mr. King. "What was the trouble about?"

"Nothing at all," put in Maggie at last. "At any rate"—And there she stopped. She was not going to confide in Mr. King, that was very certain.

"At any rate what?" asked Gregory. "Good heavens, Miss Brown, why don't you make a friend of me? Surely our two heads together would be better than your pretty one alone."

"Pretty one!" retorted Maggie angrily. "Why do you take the trouble to talk nonsense to me, Mr. King? I am all right."

"Look here, Miss Maggie," broke in Gregory, suddenly changing his tone to one of earnestness, to a tone Maggie had never heard from him before, because it wasn't his natural one, "look here, Miss Maggie, I'm not a man who pays compliments. And if I say you are pretty it is because you are just like a picture I have got in my pocket at this present moment. It's an illustration out of a Christmas number, and it's the very image of you, just as you look now!"

And out of one of Gregory King's great-coat pockets came the little chromo.



"I cut it out, because it was so like you. I'm going to keep it for the same reason. Would you like to look at it? Well, you can't see it now, the wind would tear it to pieces. But I'll lend it to you to look at by yourself, on the condition you don't let anybody else see it. Can do?"

It was too tormenting to see little flashes of colour waving about in the wind, as the picture itself was kept steadily turned away from her.

"I promise," she said, looking hastily around to make sure no one was overhearing her. And the picture was immediately folded up and put into her hand.

"Don't look at it now," Mr. King said. "I want you to talk to me. Only for a little, because at that corner I turn off home. Tell me something about yourself. To begin with, why do you dislike me?"

"Dislike you! I'm sure I don't," said Maggie hurriedly, though it is to be feared she was not quite considering the truth in so speaking. For up to the present she had disliked him very much. Quite groundlessly too, as she now perceived in a moment.

"Ah, but you do," said Gregory plaintively. "You are so absorbed in Mr. Wong. How can you throw yourself away upon—Pardon me," he broke in again. "I have no business to speak to you like this. You must not resent it, though. Tell me you forgive me."

Here was the turn. Gregory King held out his hand with a beseeching air.

What could Maggie do but take it? And say "Thank you, Mr. King," for something or other. Oh yes, she was thanking him for the picture.

But her ill-temper was quite gone by the time she got home again. And as for Mr. King, as he walked briskly home he was quite satisfied with himself. He had done a friendly

act towards a pretty girl. If only she would tell Peter Wong, how angry the Chinaman would be! Gregory King found himself wishing to make the young man angry. Anything to relieve the monotony of Chingcha.

And if she didn't tell him, it was better still. Why better Gregory King did not decide in so many words. But he had always delighted in mysteries and secrets, even on the most insignificant subjects. This loan of a picture looked promising for, at least, a mild flirtation with Maggie. And such an amusement would suit his taste, for a time at any rate, better than even the purring attentions of tea, toast, and comfortable armchairs of Mrs. Brown.

But Maggie got no chance of returning the chromo, in secret, for a good many days. In fact, it was still in her possession when the steamer carried Mr. King off for a week's visit to Shanghai. Still, neither Mrs. Brown nor Mr. Wong knew anything about it. And Maggie herself no longer listened with approving silence to Peter Wong's angry speeches about Mr. King's rudeness.

---

## CHAPTER IV.

子不我思豈無他人 *If, sir, you do not love me, is there no one else? . . . .*

"Mr. King has come back from Shanghai with a bad attack of influenza," said Mr. Brown at tiffin.

"Indeed? Then I suppose we shan't have him at your birthday party, Lucy," remarked Dr. Mackenzie.

He had suddenly returned from an up-country raid, and was eating voraciously.

"I don't expect he will be able to come," went on Mr. Brown. "Perhaps you had better go over and see him, Mackenzie."

"I have not been sent for yet," returned the doctor stiffly. He rose as he spoke, and walked off to his study, as he invariably did when the conversation had taken an unpleasant turn.

And the unlucky Maggie had three of the doctor's books in her room, which she was dying to put back in his study! What if he should miss them, and raise a hue and cry after them? She had better go out, and keep away for the afternoon, till the doctor's reading fit had passed, and her mother was away calling. Then she might slip in and put them back again.

But her little stratagem was all in vain. Peter Wong overtook her before she had got to the ferry, and insisted on taking her for a walk, during which she was treated to the whole of his proposed sermon for next Sunday. And when she came home, late for tea, she found Gregory King sitting in his armchair, drinking tea and chatting with Mrs. Brown.

The two who occupied the armchairs were so engrossed in their own conversation that they took no notice of Peter and Maggie. They were left entirely to their own resources, which, in the case of Peter Wong, were not great. He subsided into an ancient rocking chair, and left Maggie to try to edge her way, if she had the fancy to do so, into the conversation.

But there was no place for her there, and she withdrew, slightly mortified, to the side of Peter Wong.

And now Satan himself entered into her. Not in the orthodox form, as a roaring lion, but as an angel of light. He filled her with shame, to begin with, at her deceitfulness in general, first, in taking Dr. Mackenzie's books, and secondly, in taking Mr. King's picture. Then he prompted her to make speedy restitution, and to ease her conscience. And so, after sitting for a while, apparently listening to the conversation by the fire, interrupted as it occasionally was by fits of sneezing from the influenza-fated Gregory, Maggie walked out of the room, went upstairs, took the three missing books from their hiding-place (among her stockings), and thrusting the little picture into her pocket, regardless of crumpling it, went down to Dr. Mackenzie's study.

"Come in!"

The voice sounded irritable. Dr. Mackenzie had wasted a good hour over his search.

"Here are your books. I took them to read."

What made Maggie so bold? Her voice sounded quite

strange to her ears, so brave was it. But her hand was shaking as she put down the guilty three on the table close to the doctor.

He turned on her in speechless astonishment, but in astonishment that had not one trace of anger in it.

"Why didn't you tell me you had taken them, my child?"

Just a suspicion of reproach in his tone, not of blame. Maggie's heart softened in a moment, and she felt a great desire to confess everything and be honest to this man, at least.

"I was afraid. Mother would have been angry."

And now Dr. Mackenzie looked at her hard, almost as though for the first time in her life he had realised she was a separate living, thinking, feeling being.

"But why did you take them, Maggie? They are not fit for you to read. You see," he went on, as though she was expecting him to apologise for himself, "a missionary must know everything. But a girl needn't, especially a girl who is soon going to be married."

Here he stopped short. Maggie's eyes were looking at him with such a hurt expression, at least so he fancied, that the tender-hearted doctor realised all of a sudden that he had touched on some tender place.

"What is it, Maggie, dear child? What do you want?"

And he came across the room to where she was standing near the door, put his two thin nervous hands on her shoulders, and looked straight into her face.

Maggie flinched. There are sometimes things in a girl's mind that she is ashamed to put into words, ashamed of even thinking. And of what was Maggie thinking, unconsciously thinking now? Surely it was Satan himself who was filling her with this strong feeling of repulsion towards her future life, as alluded to by the doctor, and towards her future husband. And as it was a temptation of the Evil One, not to speak of

folly in a worldly sense, Dr. Mackenzie could have no sympathy with her. So she resorted to prevarication, as was most natural for a woman in her circumstances.

"I wish you would help me"—her voice gave a little break here—"to educate myself. I'm so ignorant, you see."

Dr. Mackenzie was disappointed; Maggie could feel he was, for she dared not look up into his face. She felt he would see in her eyes she was not speaking the truth, and she did so want him to think well of her, too!

"I will see about your reading. I will consult Peter Wong about it."

"Oh no, don't, please, please don't!"

Maggie's voice was quite beyond her control now, and two tears came rolling down her cheeks. She was a little nervous and overwrought, that was all, and the tears were only natural. But they alarmed Dr. Mackenzie immensely.

"Don't cry, dear child, don't cry," he said, drawing out his handkerchief, such an old and ragged one it was! and wiping Maggie's cheeks. "There! there!" and he patted her shoulder softly. "Run upstairs, and wipe your eyes, and be sure I won't say anything to anybody about you without your leave."

He was very anxious to get her out of the room, being in mortal dread of hysterics, or some such feminine exhibition of nerves. And at the same time he felt sorry he had let her go without finding out what was really the matter with her.

"Something is going wrong with that girl," he mused to himself, "and she came here to tell me, and ask my advice. No, it wasn't only to put back the books. She could have done that while I was out. What is the matter?"

He had been stirring an utterly defunct fire all this time, and now suddenly realised the room was chill and damp.

"Are her father and mother unkind to her? That wouldn't matter, since she's going out of the house so soon. Ah!"

Some idea had suddenly struck Dr. Mackenzie. He was not given to thinking usually, but to making up his mind all in a moment, and to acting on the resolve thus made. He had been acting hitherto, towards this girl, on one of these resolutions: that it was right that she, the only marriageable person in the Mission, should be given to the most promising convert from heathenism. The convert was ready, willing, glad; but, was it possible? . . .

There was a great flash of doubt in that "Ah!" which somehow sounded down the room, seemed to entangle itself in a hideous Joss in the dusk near the door, and came back uncomfortably to the doctor's ear. He was speaking his strange new fear aloud.

It was uncomfortable work, this thinking. Dr. Mackenzie stood up, and shook off his mood.

"It must be tea-time." So he went out, and into the parlour, to be free from himself.

There was Gregory King, sitting in his armchair, Mrs. Brown opposite, and Peter Wong standing near the door, like a shy schoolboy, biting his nails furiously. Dr. Mackenzie walked to the fire-end of the room, and asked Mrs. Brown for a cup of tea.

He was not half through it when Maggie's voice sounded close by.

"Here is your picture, Mr. King. I have quite finished with it."

The doctor turned round with a start. Mrs. Brown nearly dropped the teapot. And Peter Wong walked up and looked over Gregory King's shoulder at the mysterious bit of paper.

It was plain every one was confounded. Maggie herself was crimson. Mr. King alone kept his presence of mind.

"A picture, Miss Brown? Let us look at it."

Quickly smoothing it out, he held it up before Mrs. Brown, with the back carefully turned towards Peter Wong.

"Very like you, Miss Brown!" he continued, as if the likeness had just struck him. "Don't you think so, Dr. Mackenzie?"

Dr. Mackenzie's curiosity had already been aroused. He looked eagerly, though silently, at the picture.

"Where did you get it, Maggie?"

Mrs. Brown's voice was very stern. There was clearly a domestic storm ahead.

"It doesn't matter to me where she got it. Miss Brown has given it to me now—and I mean to keep it."

Gregory accompanied this gallant speech with an approving nod at Maggie, and a smile at Mrs. Brown.

Dr. Mackenzie looked from Maggie to Mr. King, and from Mr. King to Peter Wong, who was frowning furiously, and biting his nails harder than ever.

What on earth was the matter with all of them? Or rather, what kind of girl was Maggie after all?

Only ten minutes ago she had come to him, and confessed to abstracting most improper books, in his opinion, from his library. He had forgiven her that. Now here she was, in the presence of the man she was going to marry, giving what she meant to be a likeness of herself to another man.

Could it be that he was mistaken in her after all? Was she an ordinary, vain, empty-headed woman, with no regard for modesty in her desire for flattery?

Impossible, quite impossible. Dr. Mackenzie had never been mistaken in his estimate of character before. Appearances were undoubtedly against her, but there was an explanation somewhere. He nudged Peter Wong, and whispered to him a word of advice. Not to speak, but to go out of the room. The doctor felt he could defend Maggie, if it were necessary to do so, better in his absence.

But Peter Wong did not, or would not, hear the words.



And Gregory King in the meanwhile rolled up the picture, put it in his pocket, and said :

“ Well, I must be off. Many thanks again, Miss Brown.”

“ Good-bye, Mr. King. I hope you won’t find it more damaged than it was when you gave it to me.”

She ought to have said this, of course. It would have explained everything, and left Dr. Mackenzie’s heart lighter, and his brain less puzzled, on his evening walk. But Maggie hadn’t said that. In fact, she hadn’t said anything to any one; only fled, when she saw Mr. King preparing to take his departure. Fled to her room till supper-time—fled from the wrath to come.

---

## CHAPTER V.

對影自成雙 *He and his shadow make a pair.* . . .

Gregory King was thoroughly out of temper that evening.

First grief; he had broken a tooth over an iron shot in his pheasant. Broken an excellent tooth, which showed a good deal when he smiled the smile that was so becoming to him. Of course it was the boy's fault, for having bought a pheasant killed with iron shot. But where was the satisfaction in swearing at him? The idiot understood no expression that did not begin and end with a D. He actually thought his master called for more potatoes, or, grim irony, a toothpick. A broken tooth was grief enough to last an ordinary mortal a long time.

But misfortunes never come alone. Here he was, sneezing every other minute, in a draughty room, with a chimney that smoked, the atmosphere outside growing perceptibly colder every second. His head felt like a brick, his shoulders ached, and his eyes were streaming. He was in for a severe attack of influenza, and his afternoon's expedition across the river had been, so to speak, the last nail in the coffin of his health. And, third grief, what had that same expedition brought him in the way of unpleasantness?

That scene at the Browns was a disagreeable one to recall. For the moment, maybe, he had saved himself, and let it be imagined that it was Maggie who was courting him, not he who had made the first advances to her. But Gregory's experience of the world had taught him this misunderstanding could not long continue. What would Mrs. Brown have already done? Questioned Maggie, and found out the truth, which there was no motive to conceal. And then how would he, Gregory King, stand in the eyes of Mrs. Brown, of Dr. Mackenzie, even of that Peter Wong, with his fat face and coarse black hair?

The thought of Peter Wong condemning him was the most riling part of this grief. But even now Gregory's cup was not full.

Looking back on it in solitude, between his fits of sneezing, Gregory King half admitted that his trip to Shanghai had been a failure. Of course he had told himself, before starting, that he did not expect anything to come out of it. And yet he had expected—what? No less than his recall to that earthly Paradise from this deadly Chingcha.

He had gone, and seen, but not conquered. His juniors, who had formerly looked up to, and copied, and fawned on him, were all busy doing just the same to the man who had stepped into his place. "Oh, is that you, King? How do you like Chingcha? Pretty dull, isn't it?"—that was all the welcome he had got from his own firm.

Outside the hong, among his own particular set, it was worse still. They had filled up his place, and the new friend was a more popular, a more brilliant man, than Gregory. They did not know what to do with him now, and they took no pains to conceal their ignorance.

But the ladies treated him worst. Fickle all over the world, women-friends are doubly fickle to their admirers in

Shanghai. They can there afford to pick and choose, dictate, make any terms they please, certain that a dozen docile swains can at any moment be called in to replace one rebel. This is one advantage they obtain from being so much in a minority. True, that Gregory King had been a great favourite. But two months' absence will make even the fondest heart to wander. In short, two days thoroughly disgusted Mr. King with Shanghai. It was better, after all, to be somebody in Chingcha than thirteenth at a tiffin, where he was paired off with the governess, called in to avoid the unlucky number. Of course, tiffin-parties are not arranged in an hour, and Gregory might himself, in past days, have treated in the same cavalier fashion some friend from an outport who had turned up at the last moment. Nevertheless, it is humiliating to be invited simply because you have called just as the hostess was going to change her dress for the company, and to mark your presence was not expected by the number of cutlets provided by the frugal Celestial who presides in the cookhouse.

Chingcha *was* a dreary place, notwithstanding! It rained twice as much there as in Shanghai. And, when it was fine, there was nothing to do, no one to see. Only these missionaries with their petty differences, their narrow views of society, their badly-dressed women, and their pushing familiar converts.

Here Gregory was back again at Grief No. 3. A grief, however, evidently not altogether unmixed with satisfaction. For, regardless of warning creaks from its arms, Gregory leaned back in his chair, smoothed his moustache, and smiled.

The ladies, he mused, were clean gone on him. Take Mrs. Brown, for example. She had always liked him from the first. And, ladies' man as he prided himself on being, he had known how to keep her goodwill. To begin with, he had submitted to her sympathetic ear, in strict confidence,

a few commonplace, society doubts on the verbal inspiration of the Bible, the God of the Pentateuch, freewill and predestination, and so on. And when she had, to the best of her powers and her husband's meagre library, satisfied these doubts, he had made her soar with him to the giddy heights of the *Essay on Liberty*. Beyond this Gregory King could scarcely go, and it was already too high for Mrs. Brown. She was in fact, he told himself, in great danger of losing her heart to him. Mr. King's past experience had taught him that to come for advice and guidance, especially on subjects of which she is totally ignorant, to a woman, is often an excellent way of making her a firm friend for life.

But at this point in his cogitations Gregory King sneezed at least ten times running. This so entirely broke the thread of his thoughts that he judged it wisest to go to bed.

To sleep? Dear me, that was not to be dreamed of. The influenza-fiend had got well hold of him, and only let him drop into a restless doze to arouse him quickly with a horrible nightmare. The lamp, which he always kept alight, though carefully turned down, sputtered, flared, and finally blew out in a gust of wind that burst open the crazy door. The boy was, of course, sleeping in some inaccessible room in an outer yard. The draught was insupportable, but Gregory feared to get up, for, shivering as he was under the bedclothes, the cold must be ten times more intense away from them.

Crack, slit! What was that? His toe had caught in a hole in the sheet, and was tearing it wide open. How prickly the blanket was! No, that wasn't blanket, only mattress below him. The lazy brute of a Chinaman had forgotten to put a blanket below the sheet! Now, the door was banging. He must get up and shut it. Where were the matches? Here was the box, put by his orders always within reach. By Jove, not a single match in it!

---

Gregory never forgot, in after life, the horror of that night. He had finally just dropped asleep, towards early morning, when the whistle of his, or rather his firm's, steamer aroused him to his day's work. It was a playful habit the Chingcha steamers possessed, to come into port before daylight, and waken every one by their cheerful whistling. The Commissioner and the Consul could mutter something strong under their breaths, turn round, and go to sleep again. But the unfortunate agent, sleepless night or not, had to get up, increase his influenza, lay the seeds of all other deadly diseases, and smile still.

"Only married men should be sent to outports." Gregory King had long been debating this in his mind. And a damp shirt, cold coffee, and the torn sheet settled it. If a house is uncomfortable, it is of no use to bully your Chinese servants. The only way to make life endurable in Chingcha was to have a wife to—not bully, but keep house for one.

By the afternoon, when the steamer had gone, Gregory King fancied himself so seriously ill that he thought it best to send for Dr. Mackenzie.

---

## CHAPTER VI.

誰謂女無家 *Who can say that you did not get me  
betrothed? . . . .*

"Samuel, isn't it time for Maggie to get married? How long is this engagement to keep dragging on?"

Mr. Brown was comfortably in bed, reading. Ostensibly and outwardly, the *Christian* newspaper. In reality, a most fascinating account of a wonderful cure by Mother Seigel's Syrup, of symptoms almost identical with his own. Very provoking to be interrupted.

"Eh, my dear, what did you say? Yes, certainly."

"I was speaking of Maggie," returned Mrs. Brown severely. "What are you reading, Samuel?"

She had finished arranging her hair for the night in a series of wonderful little plaits, and came to look over her husband's shoulder.

"Oh nothing!" he said, hastily shutting up the paper. "I was half dozing. What did you say?"

For Dr. Mackenzie, after having experimented on an entire luckless village, and finding it equally useless for cholera, small-pox and ophthalmia, had pronounced against Mother Seigel. So it was dangerous treason to hanker after this forbidden fruit,

"I was speaking about Maggie," said Mrs. Brown reprovingly. "She is your daughter, not mine, thank goodness! And I cannot undertake the responsibility of her any longer."

"What has she been doing now?" asked Mr. Brown, composing himself to slumber in a listening attitude. For as a general rule Mrs. Brown's complaints of Maggie's ways and "tone of mind" lasted into the small hours, and only required his bodily presence, not his listening powers.

But to-day sleep was not to be suffered to visit his eyelids so early.

"She is behaving in a most improper way, Samuel. I don't like to tell you all I think about her. Didn't you notice anything this evening at supper? Dr. Mackenzie wouldn't speak to her! He is as disgusted with her as I am."

Mr. Brown had noticed nothing; but now he seemed to recall an awful stillness that had brooded over the supper table. Yes, now he realised that Maggie's eyes had been red, and that she had once looked up at him wistfully, in the old way he remembered her mother had done, long, long ago, when——

Mrs. Brown was in the middle of her story by now. Maggie's crime did not appear a great one in her father's eyes, which were softened by these old recollections. But of course he dared not express his sentiments, and, coward that he was, got out of the necessity of criticising his child by assenting to her fate.

"Yes," he said, a trifle sadly, for he was more tender-hearted than most people, his wife included, gave him credit for. "If she is to be married—and I think that is the best thing for her—the sooner the better."

"I think, directly after China New Year," said Mrs. Brown. "Exactly so. The last week in February."

"I can stand her for another six weeks or so," thought Mrs. Brown as she blew out the candle. "But I couldn't much longer."



And so Maggie's wedding was fixed for 28th February, and she and Peter Wong were duly apprised of the fact.

Both the young people received the news with perfect unconcern. This was only to be expected from Peter Wong, who had cultivated the art of appearing indifferent to the very highest possible degree. But Mr. Brown, who had been appointed to inform Maggie, felt a little alarmed, if not pained, by her almost sullen acquiescence.

"I don't fancy Maggie's very well," he said, joining his wife and Dr. Mackenzie in the parlour.

"Indeed? It is scarcely to be wondered at," said Mrs. Brown drily. But Dr. Mackenzie fidgetted in his chair, and was immensely relieved when a coolie entering with Gregory King's summons gave him an opportunity of cooling his brains by warming his body with a fast walk to the sick man's house. And, by dint of putting away all thoughts of the home disagreeables, he was in the blindest of tempers by the time he reached the ancient hong presided over by Mr. King.

His patient was, after all, not so very ill. A good many years in the Far East had made Gregory exceedingly careful of himself. Quite justifiably so, as very few of those who had come out with him, somewhere in the Sixties, had survived the whiskies-and-sodas, the *D.T.*'s, the cholera, and the malarial fevers which beset the path of the dweller in a foreign land. And so, after Dr. Mackenzie had satisfied himself that Gregory's temperature scarcely touched 100°, and that he had only to stay indoors and pile in quinine, the doctor felt so genially inclined that he dropped into Gregory's proffered armchair, and began to talk.

"The wedding day is fixed," he said, plunging, according to his wont, headlong into the subject that was uppermost in his mind.

"Wedding day? Whose wedding day?" asked Gregory.

For, though he guessed the answer perfectly, the announcement was somewhat of a shock to him.

"Miss Brown's," answered Dr. Mackenzie, abruptly. He had just realised that, after all, it was this very man to whom he was speaking who had been the cause of this determination on the part of Maggie's parents.

"Very sudden, is it not?" said Gregory. "May I ask, without any impertinence, if that little scene yesterday had anything to do with this?"

While he was saying these words, Gregory was deliberating in his mind whether it would not be wisest to make a clean breast, *i.e.* give his own version, of his share in that scene to Dr. Mackenzie. He was rather inclining towards this step when the doctor turned on him with an excited gleam in his bright black eyes.

"Yes, Mr. King, emphatically yes. The poor young girl is in need of a guide and protector, a better guide and protector than Providence has hitherto been pleased to grant her. And as she has chosen our young friend, or rather, our young friend and convert has chosen her, who am I to keep them asunder?"

Gregory King stared for a moment at his companion in genuine open-mouthed amazement. True, he had formerly heard rumours of the instability of the doctor's headpiece. True, he had heard of deeds which no self-seeking, or sane, man could have done. But never before had he heard from the doctor's own lips what seemed to him such evidence of the weakness of his intellect. Clearly this was not a man to confide in, at this time at any rate.

The certainty that the doctor was, for the time being, not wholly responsible for his words, imparted a peculiar ring of superiority to Gregory's voice, as he answered:—

"And do you then imagine Peter Wong, a Chinaman, will

be a guide and protector to a girl like Maggie Brown? She requires—some one like—” here he hesitated for a moment, then abruptly brought out—“Some one like yourself.”

It was a sudden inspiration on Gregory's part to say this. He had not meant to do so when he began his sentence, he did not mean it now. But, was it possible? No, it could not have been a blush that reddened Dr. Mackenzie's excited face. It was only the fire suddenly breaking out into flame, and lighting up the long grey beard and wild unkempt hair.

“Good evening, Mr. King, I will call and see you to-morrow. But I doubt not you will be much better by then.”

“By Jove!” mused Gregory, as he drew his chair close to the fire, and ill-temperedly pushed away the very grimy cat which generally occupied the centre place on the hearthrug. “Is it possible he is in love with her himself? Ridiculous!”

And then he fell a-thinking.

There was going to be a wedding. But what a wedding! He could imagine the small and stuffy chapel crowded with greasy, familiar, pushing Chinese, friends and relations of Wong, who as converts would consider they had a right to shake hands with you, criticise the bride, or even—kiss her after the ceremony.

No, luckily Chinese custom forbade that. But that creature Wong was such a fool, he would not know how to keep his fellow-countrymen at a proper distance. Most likely he wouldn't want to do so. In all probability he thought as even Dr. Mackenzie had put it, that he was choosing her. Choosing a genuine English girl!

“Dinner leady.”

The dinner was a vile one, badly cooked and served. Mr. King made a meal off bread and butter and whisky and hot water. The drink would have been much nicer if it had had a dash of lemon and sugar. But there were no lemons in the house. Who ever knew a bachelor's house where there were?

Close to the fire again, Gregory King mused on at his ease. What had made Maggie behave as she had done yesterday?

The answer was plain, to a man with Gregory's experience of women.

She was in love with him! Not to be wondered at, of course, considering what a very fascinating man he was. Poor Maggie! Everything he remembered about her conduct of late confirmed him in this opinion. She changed colour when he came into a room. Surely she had taken greater pains with her dress lately; surely her skirts had hung straighter—

Stay! was it possible that it was his own artistic eye that was at fault, that he was getting accustomed to crooked lines and irregular distances? Horrible thought! But no, ten thousand times no! The doors and windows were just as crooked to him at that moment as they had seemed when he first beheld them three months ago. For, years ago, the foundations had given, and the whole house was now leaning gradually forward.

She was not a bad girl, by any means. In fact, there was a good deal to be made out of her, by a man who knew how to manage her properly. Good looking, in an uncommon way. Quite, quite different from any Shanghai beauty. Voice sweet and low, with none of your odious provincial accents. Thrown away, absolutely thrown away, on that creature Wong.

And then, what a degradation for the whole European community this marriage was! How the Commissioner would sneer as he congratulated the "happy" pair. How he would enquire of King himself news of "his friend Mr. Wong and his charming wife!"

But why on earth did Gregory concern himself in this matter? Clearly it was no business of his—except that no right-minded man ought to look on calmly and see such a hideous sacrifice made of one of his countrywomen.

What a difference there would have been if she had been going to marry, say, the Commissioner! No, she would have been out of place there. He was too old, and his household was conducted on lines not approved of by missionaries. The Consul? He also was not a marrying man.

Eleven o'clock. The quinine was buzzing in his ears, and it was high time to be in bed. His temperature must be going up, his hands felt so hot and dry. A hot drink in bed, just before going to sleep, that was the right thing. He pealed the bell, and the rotten cord broke, after the fashion of Chingcha bells. He went out into the passage, and shouted for the boy. Answer came there none. Gregory King went up to bed in a towering passion.

"This place is —— (a sneeze, and the sudden discovery that the window was wide open) alone. I shall have to get married after all."

And then he fell into a dreamful sleep.

---

## CHAPTER VII.

蓄極則洩 *That which is over-pent breaks out at last.* . . .

"Dr. Mackenzie, you must stop this marriage."

The doctor was leaning back in his armchair, nervously opening and shutting his eyes. Gregory, standing on the hearthrug, was watching him intently.

"Impossible, Mr. King. It is not my concern, you see."

Dr. Mackenzie's voice was flurried, and his eyelids moved more rapidly than ever. For he was hearing with his bodily ears what a small voice had kept whispering to his conscience ever since, with shame be it said, that afternoon when Maggie had brought back the books into his study.

"Not your concern, Dr. Mackenzie? Surely you have just told me you made the match!"

Now Dr. Mackenzie had not just told him this, though Gregory King had certainly often heard it. But it was so true that the doctor could not deny it.

"In as far as such a thing can be made, Mr. King," he said with something of dignity in his voice, which to Gregory seemed absurdly out of place, "I have made this match. May the Almighty give His blessing on it!"

"Now, don't bring the Almighty's name into such an affair

as *this!*" retorted Gregory. "You try to get out of your responsibility for bringing together two utterly unsuitable persons by calling upon Providence to look after them. As though you could shift your responsibility on to God's shoulders! No, Dr. Mackenzie, these ejaculations don't deceive yourself. You are far too clear-sighted not to have seen that Miss Brown is being sacrificed, not for God's glory, but for what? To gratify her stepmother's spite."

"After all, Mr. King, these are scarcely your affairs."

There was a dangerous sound in the doctor's voice. King sat down in his chair, and drew it closer to his companion.

"You are right, Dr. Mackenzie," he said sorrowfully. "I have neither part nor lot in this matter. But there was something about your household, some influence coming I don't know from where,—certainly it couldn't be from Mr. and Mrs. Brown—" here he allowed himself to smile sarcastically—"that attracted me. I, too, have lately come to feel that there may be something in this life better than what we can perceive with our senses. I have seen that there can be at any rate one man whose thoughts are not of the earth, earthy. But when I saw a reptile like that Wong batten on your high-mindedness, taking advantage of your unworldliness to try to make himself a position in the Mission, when I heard him boasting of what he would do when he was left in charge, then I felt it was my duty to open your eyes to the serpent you were nourishing in your bosom. Ungrateful task as I know it—"

"Stop!" said the doctor, sitting bolt upright. "May I ask you to repeat what you have just said?"

The doctor was as simple as a child in his knowledge of the world; as jealous as a woman of his own position in it. Gregory King was doubtless unaware of this, as Peter Wong, poor innocent, was unaware of the sentiments just being imputed to him.

"No, no, it doesn't matter," said Gregory hastily. "I don't want to hurt the young man. Young people will talk. But: is he a fit husband for Maggie?"

Brought back to this problem, Dr. Mackenzie at once began to fidget.

"I can't see anything better for her," he said at length, standing up to go. "I think she would be happier married than she is now at home."

"I grant it," said Gregory earnestly. "She must be married, but why to Wong? Can't you think of any one more suitable for her?"

He was looking with a searching glance into the doctor's face. The corners of Dr. Mackenzie's mouth twitched. Gregory could see that even underneath the thick moustache.

"I don't know, I don't know," the doctor repeated. "I don't fancy—"

"Ah!" said Gregory quickly. "You don't fancy I, for instance, would marry her, just to oblige you? That's what you were thinking? By Jove, doctor, that *was* uppermost in your mind. Come, don't deny it now!"

Very certainly this had not been the idea uppermost in Dr. Mackenzie's mind. The change of colour in his face showed this, and his voice was not quite steady as he answered.

"It is a difficult question altogether, Mr. King. I will think it over."

"And let me know if you want me to marry her."

The doctor scarcely caught these last words. He had grasped his battered sunhat and was already outside the door.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was all very well, though, for Dr. Mackenzie to say he would think over the matter. In reality he had not the faintest intention of doing so. And, in addition to not having the wish, he certainly had not the power of thinking over any



subject. Pre-eminently the doctor was a man of impulse, easily carried away by an idea or "inspiration," and then sticking at nothing when once his mind was made up. Just now his mind was not made up, only unhinged, and so ready to receive any impression either in favour of, or against, Peter Wong and his bride-elect.

Why had the Fates decreed that this should be Mrs. Brown's birthday? Why did they oblige the doctor to spend this evening in the bosom of the family? Why did Satan put it into the luckless Peter Wong's heart to play the gallant, a part which suited him so badly? Why, oh why, was Mrs. Brown triumphantly, condescendingly jubilant? The doctor's back was up, mentally, before the evening meal was announced.

Then came the first hitch. The frugal housewife had provided eggs and bacon to open the repast, one egg to each person. Peter Wong, seated next to Maggie, was offered the nearly empty dish, containing two portions, one for himself and one for his companion. He carelessly helped himself to both.

"Mr. Wong," Mrs. Brown's voice sounded sharply, "You have taken Maggie's share as well as your own."

"Indeed!" answered Peter Wong with an attempt at jocularly, though he was blushing furiously. "Perhaps you'll take one off my plate, Maggie."

"Have another egg poached," broke in Dr. Mackenzie impatiently. "Wong, you had better hand the whole plate over to Maggie."

"Why?" asked the innocent Wong.

Dr. Mackenzie growled out an answer, which luckily did not reach his convert's ears. And the meal, kept back by the doctor's orders till the egg was produced, finished unpleasantly for most of the parties concerned.

After the table had been cleared, Dr. Mackenzie settled in an armchair, with a number of the *Lancet* to study. It was an uninteresting number, or rather, he was engaged in listening to the talk that was going on in an undertone near him.

Mr. Brown, under the influence of a good supper, was expanding with fatherly feeling.

"What present shall I make you, Maggie?"

She was sitting near him, as close as she could get. Which meant, as far away as possible from the other two. Wong was holding a skein of wool for Mrs. Brown.

"Whatever you like, father."

They were almost the first words she had uttered that evening. Dr. Mackenzie stole a look at her out of the corner of one eye. She had slipped her hand through her father's arm, and was twisting about his watchchain.

"Would you like a watch and chain, Maggie?"

Before she had time to answer, Mrs. Brown put in:—

"What absurd nonsense, Samuel! To give a girl in the position she is going to be in an ornament! Far better give her half-a-dozen spoons and forks."

"Far better," chimed in Peter Wong, laughing. "I should get the benefit of them too, Mr. Brown. Whereas it would look ridiculous in me to wear a lady's watch."

At this juncture the *Lancet* was crushed together, and Dr. Mackenzie hastily stood up.

"Is the lamp lighted in my study, Maggie?"

"It always is," said Mrs. Brown, as testily as she dared. "I look after it myself; Maggie has nothing to do with it."

"Then Brown, favour me with a few minutes there."

The few minutes lengthened into a half-hour. The clock struck ten, Peter Wong yawned loudly, and took his departure. Maggie bade Mrs. Brown good night, and went up to bed.

But when Mrs. Brown, burning with curiosity, tapped at the study door to summon them to prayers, she was not enlightened on the subject of their conversation at all. Both Mr. Brown and Dr. Mackenzie were sitting reading, as though they had done nothing else the whole evening.

And not a word did Mrs. Brown get out of her much disquieted husband all that night.

---

## CHAPTER VIII.

信誓旦旦不思其反 *Clearly were we sworn to good faith, and  
I did not think the engagement would be broken. . . .*

It was on the next afternoon, as Dr. Mackenzie was nearing his own door, that he caught sight of Peter Wong bearing straight down on him.

"Things are going splendidly, doctor," he said exultingly. "I've seen a house, a Chinese one of course, that will just suit me. Quite handy to the Mission, and yet not too far away from my own family. I mean them to take Maggie in as a regular daughter, you know. They will soon get over her appearance. Do you think I ought to make her wear Chinese dress at once, and eat our chow-chow, which I, of course, like much better than foreign food? Or should I wait awhile?"

"Miss Brown must never wear Chinese dress. And I don't think she would like your chow-chow," said the doctor slowly.

"Not as Miss Brown, perhaps, but as Mrs. Wong? I shall have the deciding then, you may be sure! At any rate, I don't mean to let Mrs. Brown interfere with my household. I shall do just what I like with my own wife. We've passed the house, doctor! Let us go back."

For Dr. Mackenzie had caught hold of Peter's arm with an iron grip, and was hurrying him on.

"You are making me out of breath, doctor. I can't walk as fast as you. Do let me go!"

And the doctor did so. What was more, he stopped suddenly short. They were well beyond the house now, and right in the teeth of the wind, which was sweeping straight down the river. On one side frowned the city wall, just touched with brown here and there where the dead creeper still clung to it. Peter Wong shivered, in spite of his warm greatcoat, but his companion, without his usual rusty cloak, did not seem to feel the wind.

"Wong," he said solemnly, "my dear Peter, you must give up this marriage. It can't take place."

Peter Wong stared at him in most utterably blank astonishment. Then, thinking it was probably a joke, he began to laugh.

"Don't laugh," said Dr. Mackenzie earnestly. "This is far too serious to be laughed about. I repeat it: you must give up this marriage."

He was so evidently serious that Peter's tone at once changed.

"Why?"

"Because you are not suited to each other."

A great look of relief came into the young fellow's face.

"Oh, is that all? I thought it was something more, perhaps. If that's all—"

"It's quite enough," interrupted the doctor. "I won't allow this engagement to go any farther. You are not fit for her, nor—"

"These are all questions," broke in Peter hastily, "which cannot come up now. The marriage is arranged, the day is fixed. I cannot draw back. I should lose face entirely among my own people. I cannot think of it."

His words roused Dr. Mackenzie's slumbering wrath to an uncontrollable pitch.

"And so, to save your face—not for any other reason, you would tie her to you for life! Monstrous, unchristian, unmanly in you, Peter! I tell you, you shan't marry her, and I herewith break off the match!"

He was white with anger, and out of breath with the rapidity of his words. The wind caught his long coat-tails and whirled them wildly round his shoulders, where they seemed to meet and tangle in his ragged beard, flying loose all round his face. He looked unearthly to Peter, already nearly reduced to imbecility by cold and terror.

"You are not the one to decide, Dr. Mackenzie. You are not Maggie's father."

It was Peter's first act of rebellion, and it was made at a most injudicious moment.

"No, I am not her father," answered the doctor, suddenly turning scarlet. "But I speak with his knowledge and approval. Will you come and see if this is not the case?"

Peter would fain have resisted, apologised, taken back all he had said, left all to Dr. Mackenzie's clearer judgment. Too late. The doctor had clutched him again, and dragged him back to the house, into his own study, whither the luckless Mr. Brown had retired to compose his next Sunday's sermon in peace. The sound of a jingling piano, accompanied by a voice resembling a Jew's harp, warned them that Mrs. Brown was within reasonable distance. Dr. Mackenzie closed and locked the door.

"Mr. Brown," he began, before Peter Wong had time to expostulate, "I have broken off Maggie's engagement with Mr. Wong. Do you agree?"

"Yes," answered the luckless father, without even looking round. "I agree to whatever you think right and proper, Dr. Mackenzie."

A faint gleam of triumph lighted up the doctor's eye as he looked at Peter. But it died out as suddenly as it had come.

The young man stood motionless for a moment. His hands certainly trembled a little as they twisted round and round his clerical hat, but otherwise he betrayed no emotion.

"Is that your final decision, Mr. Brown?"

There was so much of dignity in Peter's voice that Mr. Brown felt compelled to turn round, as he answered:—

"I think so, at least—"

"Yes, yes," broke in Dr. Mackenzie. "Believe me, Peter, it is the best thing for everybody concerned. Miss Brown doesn't love you, and you are not fit for her. I'll make it up to you in some other way!"

But he had not got to the end of his speech before Peter Wong, unlocking the door, had quietly bidden Mr. Brown "good afternoon," and was gone.

The two missionaries stared at each other.

"I hope it's all right, doctor," said Mr. Brown peevishly, "I hope he won't go and get up some grand revenge, and burn the house about our ears, or some such thing. What on earth made him take it so quietly?"

"He is a Christian," said the doctor gravely, "and has taken it in a Christian spirit. I wronged him in thinking he wanted some favour in return. I will see him and apologise for this wrong."

And, acting as usual, on impulse, the doctor rushed bare-headed out of the house, and soon overtook the slow-footed Peter.

"My dear boy, my dear boy," he gasped out, "forgive me that I have had to speak so plainly. Forgive me, too, that I offered you anything in return for this act of self-denial. I have done you wrong."

Peter Wong turned on the doctor his ordinary calm face of indifference.

"I do want a favour from you," he said. "Give me a month's leave of absence, that I may make my plans for the future. I shall not be able to remain here after what has occurred."

"No," said the doctor, thoughtfully. "It will be best that you should go away for the present. I am going too. You have leave for as long as you think necessary."

Peter Wong did not thank his chief. He did not utter another word. So, with an unanswered "Good night," Dr. Mackenzie retraced his steps homewards.

It did not take him long to pack. In another half-hour he came into the study again, where Mr. Brown was crouching over the fire, a prey to terror and remorse.

"Brown," he said, in a voice that made the poor man jump, "everything is settled. Wong goes away on leave. You must tell Maggie and her mother. I am going up-country myself."

"Really, I think you might have told Maggie yourself!" returned her father in an injured tone. "We don't know how she will take it, never having been consulted in the matter. And Mrs. Brown!"

The thought of what Mrs. Brown would say choked all further utterance.

"Listen, Brown," said the doctor solemnly, so solemnly that Mr. Brown trembled all over, his nerves being already very much shaken. "Tell them to-night. And say to Maggie: 'Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.'"

"Was he a safe, a responsible guide?" Mr. Brown kept on asking himself this for the next hour. The gate had long ago closed behind Dr. Mackenzie, but Mr. Brown did not yet



feel in himself strength to accomplish the task laid upon him. But it had to be done, and so at length he rose with a deep sigh, and went forth to his doom.

And yet, his lot was not nearly so hard as the task Dr. Mackenzie had laid upon his own shoulders.

Valour and safety do not always lie in attacking a difficult situation. Very often they consist in running away from danger.

And that was precisely what Dr. Mackenzie was doing. But before he went forth into the desert he had what he hoped would be an agreeable duty to perform.

Gregory King, convalescent, though looking decidedly pulled down and older, was sitting at dinner when the door was flung open and Dr. Mackenzie entered.

Now, as the doctor had already visited his patient that afternoon, he was totally unexpected. Luckily, Gregory had never professed to be a teetotaller, so his glass of claret could cause no surprise. Still, one does not like to be intruded upon in one's privacy, without knock or announcement.

But the doctor evidently noticed none of Gregory's surroundings. He had come merely to say something, and that something was :—

“Mr. King, the engagement is broken off. May you make as good a husband to Maggie as she deserves!”

“What?” asked Gregory snappishly. “Broken off, do you say? Tell me all about it.”

The doctor, however, was in no mind to stay.

“There is nothing to tell,” he answered shortly, “and I am off up-country. I shall miss the tide if I don't go at once. Good night.”

And he was gone, leaving Gregory wondering. But the tide must have waited for him, for half-an-hour later, as Gregory was enjoying his cigar, Dr. Mackenzie again appeared in the doorway, which he held wide open, letting in torrents of icy air.

---

"You will certainly marry her and be good to her, Mr. King?"

"Oh yes," answered that individual testily. "Do shut the door, though!"

The door was shut, on the outside. And Gregory King saw the doctor no more for many weeks.

## CHAPTER IX.

恩愛翻成仇恨 *Hate is the end of love.* . . .

What a blessed glorious time came for Maggie then! Happiness beyond what she had ever imagined in her wildest dreams.

True, there had been some hours of misery, when her father had come and told her and her stepmother that the engagement with Peter Wong had been ended by the doctor. Not that either of the women had thought of disputing this decision. Maggie had always been brought up to believe that a good daughter accepts the husband who has been chosen by her parents, and looks upon him as her own property from that day forth—for ever, if they are married; if not, till the match is broken off. But what was hard was, not the loss of Peter Wong, but the hopeless prospect of an interminable life at home. There was no chance of escaping from it now. She would have to listen to her stepmother's taunts without the consolation of feeling that at any rate they could not go on for ever, that her marriage would put an end to them.

But next day, when Mr. King came and asked her, not through her father, to marry him! Asked it as a favour too, he, the wonderful, the clever man, so sought after and admired by every one. It was too much happiness for her.

Quite welcome, as a wholesome tonic, was the anger, were the spiteful speeches of Mrs. Brown. What did it matter now? The greatest of men had chosen her, had allowed her to be engaged to him. His condescension almost overpowered her. She listened to his, it is to be feared somewhat long-winded, stories of his friends, and of his own exploits, in adoring admiration. He was just wicked enough to make her feel, with a laughing shudder, that he wanted the gentle influence of a wife. She would, of course, influence him, and gently—for good; every wife ought to do so. Then, he was so wise in conciliating Mrs. Brown by devoting himself to her exclusively when they three were together. For would not they two, Gregory and Maggie, have all the rest of their lives alone together?

Where did Peter Wong come into these lovely dreams? Alas, it is to be feared, nowhere. He was out of sight, and though Maggie could not put him quite out of mind, she tried her hardest to do so. He was an inharmonious feature in these scenes, for he had been treated badly. Perhaps not so much by her, but certainly on account of her.

And with Gregory she had no secrets. He knew all her evil deeds, how she had taken Dr. Mackenzie's books on the sly, and how she had confessed to the doctor in the study. But Gregory, instead of being angry, had actually laughed at it all. Yes, and had promised her any and every book she wanted. They would read them together, and he would teach her the ways of the world out of them. Surely never was there a more delightful father confessor.

There was only one person about whom they did not fully agree, and that was Dr. Mackenzie. Evidently Gregory did not admire the doctor as much as Maggie had always been trained to do. Of course he didn't say anything against him, but Maggie instinctively felt the doctor was not a hero to her

future husband. This was a pity, but did not matter much after all. For by-and-bye, after they had been married a long time, and Maggie had got over her present shyness, she might very possibly be able to bring her husband to the same mind as herself on this point.

As for Mr. Brown, all remorse he might have felt for the way in which Peter Wong had been treated had long ago been swallowed up in the satisfaction of having secured such a desirable son-in-law. The letter he wrote to Dr. Mackenzie, announcing the turn matters had taken, and naming the day fixed for his daughter's marriage, was one note of triumph from beginning to end.

Maggie also put in a little letter, briefly telling the doctor how happy she was, and thanking him for all his kindness to her in the past.

"She is happy, poor child," mused the doctor to himself, as he read the two letters by a flickering oil-lamp in a Chinese inn. "I have done the right thing, and saved her from a life of wretchedness. The happiness of another is, after all, the greatest happiness we can look for on earth."

His eyes were a trifle misty, no doubt by reason of the fumes curling round him from a little charcoal brazier. He dropped the letters into the fire, and resolutely stirred them round and round till they were reduced to a grey powder. Then he gathered his long cloak about him, and piling two or three rice bags together for a pillow, lay down and slept like a child till early morning.

Meanwhile, the weeks of Maggie's engagement flew by. It was not to be a long one, for Gregory King soon tired of playing the part of a lover. Certainly, it was not a difficult part to play with Maggie. She was far too humble and grateful to expect any attentions from him. In fact, as he grew to know her better, he found she was the very model of what he

wanted in a wife. Good-looking, when properly dressed by him, of course, so that one had no cause to blush for her. At the same time modest and shy—which meant that she would never resent her husband accepting bachelor invitations. Quick, too, to note an unspoken wish, which augured well for a housewife, whose one object in existence ought to be to make her lord and master comfortable. Gregory's prospects for his life at Chingcha were decidedly encouraging. Only he never forgot that, in bestowing himself, he was giving much more than he could ever hope to receive in return from a missionary's daughter.

Mrs. Brown, greatly mollified, if not reconciled, by the way in which Maggie was treated like a plaything, while she herself was consulted on every point, was loud in her praises of Gregory. She congratulated Maggie over and over again. "It was a most wonderful piece of good luck, a great deal better than could ever have been hoped for her. What the attraction was"—and here she would break off, leaving Maggie with an uncomfortable tingling in the ears, which lasted till her sun, Gregory King, again rose upon her darkness.

But all things come to an end, even a six weeks' engagement. And Maggie's wedding-day dawned, as warm and spring-like as could be desired.

There was, to begin with, a lengthy service at the chapel. This was performed by the bride's father, and was attended by all the missionaries in the place. To tell the truth, they were somewhat scandalised by the richness of Maggie's dress (the gift of the bridegroom), but notwithstanding this they were satisfied with the marriage, which they looked upon as a distinct recognition of their power and standing among foreigners. The native Christians, on the other hand, were rather conspicuous by their absence. They had, indeed, bestowed various gifts, in the shape of pots of flowers and

ornamental scrolls, on the bride, but they did not care to attend her wedding. Their sympathies lay rather with the absent Peter Wong.

Then followed the brief and unimpressive formality at the Consulate, where the Acting Consul, a pronounced woman-hater, made them legally man and wife. After this, a sumptuous collation at the Commissioner's, who had suddenly discovered unheard-of attractions in Gregory King, and still more in the pretty girl he had chosen as his wife. And, finally, as the *taipan* had ill-naturedly refused Gregory leave of absence for a honeymoon, the newly-married pair departed to their own house.

"Welcome, Maggie, welcome!" said Gregory, with a fine flourish of the hand, as he helped his bride out of her chair. "Here is your kingdom for the future."

He would have said more, but the boy appeared at that moment in the doorway with a very embarrassed air.

"Morning time one piecey gentleman have come. Talkee, wanchee see you."

"No can see," answered Gregory shortly.

"He no go way," persisted the boy. "Have talkee, wanchee see."

And he handed Gregory a card.

Maggie's brain was in such a whirl with all the day's events that she scarcely noticed this interruption in their progress. Nor did it strike her as curious that Gregory should seem annoyed as he asked:—

"What side have got?"

"Drawing-room."

"Maggie," said her husband, "I have to speak with a stupid fellow on business for a moment. Go up to your room. The boy will show you the way, and I will come in a second."

But Maggie had not got half-way upstairs before she heard the drawing-room bell sharply pulled, and an instant afterwards Gregory called out, in a tone that struck terror to her heart :—

“Boy! boy! quick! This side!”

She followed, scarcely knowing what she did, the boy down the stairs. The drawing-room door stood wide open, and there, facing her, in an armchair, with his head thrown back and his eyelids closed, lay Peter Wong. As she shrank back with a cry of fear, fear of she knew not what, she saw Gregory go up and touch the figure. And then, horror of horrors, it gave a lurch forward, and fell heavily to the floor.

What did it all mean? She realised what in the next awful moment, when the boy picked up from the floor a small paper, with a few grains of white powder still sticking to it.

How he had done it they never found out. But Peter Wong had revenged himself, and that in a truly Chinese fashion. He had poisoned himself in his successful rival's house, on his successful rival's wedding day.

---



## CHAPTER X.

相見何其遲 *Ah! why did we meet so late? . . . .*

"Such bad taste on his part to go and kill himself here," grumbled Gregory King to his wife, as he wound up an account of the consternation this event had caused in the Brown household. He had walked over to see his father-in-law two days after his marriage, having managed, with infinite trouble, to get Peter Wong's body removed in the meanwhile. "That shows how purely skin-deep his Christianity was. Merely the varnish on the outside of the Heathen Chinese."

Here he laughed, a vexed little laugh. For he was seriously annoyed, and Mr. Brown had not quieted his annoyance at all. That good missionary was in mortal dread of his life. The popular feeling against himself and his family, which had formerly been aroused by the rejection of Wong, was now at boiling point by reason of the young man's suicide. Indeed, the unfortunate Mr. Brown was actually contemplating immediate flight.

"I have sent a special messenger up to Dr. Mackenzie," he said, "and as soon as I get his answer I shall leave for Shanghai. My leave is due, and really none of us are safe here now."

If the missionaries were not safe, how much more unsafe was Gregory King? Even now he was keeping a good look-out on all such approaches as doors and windows, as he sat by the fire talking to his bride.

As for Maggie, she looked what she felt, utterly miserable. All her joy and gladness had been swept away for ever by this awful tragedy. She brooded over her own share in it, over the past, and reproached herself, and judged herself mercilessly, every hour she was alone. And of course she had had many solitary hours, for this suicide on foreign property had entailed a lot of trouble on Gregory. Most likely it would entail much more, and so it was quite natural that he should be thinking more of his own worries than of the poor dead man as he sat talking to Maggie.

"I blame Dr. Mackenzie most of all," he went on querulously. "He had no business to interfere with such a dangerous man as this Wong. He might have known how he would act. It's certainly a great mistake to have anything to do with missionaries!"

Still Maggie spoke not. Poor Peter! how he must really have loved her, if life was not worth living without her! Could she never, never have come to love him? A shiver at the thought of doing so ran through her even now.

"Perhaps I may get ordered to Shanghai in consequence of this row. I shan't mind the affair so much if that is the end of it."

Now Maggie stared at Gregory, in most utter astonishment. She surely could not be hearing aright.

"Yes," he said, nodding to her in answer. "The best way out of the difficulty would be to transfer us to Shanghai. I wonder I never thought of it before. I've just got time before the steamer goes to write and lay the whole matter before the firm. She won't get off till late to-night."

Off he went to his office-room. And Maggie returned to her self-tormenting.

But she was to be aided in it this afternoon. Five minutes later the door opened suddenly, and Dr. Mackenzie, looking ten times more wild, more haggard, and more ghastly, abruptly entered.

He came up to Maggie, crouching over the fire, and grasping her by the two shoulders, said in a hollow voice:—

“Maggie, Maggie, what have we done?”

This associating of her with himself touched Maggie indescribably. She turned round, and caught hold of his hand:

“Oh, doctor, I never thought he would have felt it so!”

This was precisely the thought that had been haunting the doctor. To him, as to her, the idea of a Chinese revenge had never occurred. They could only realise how they had driven Peter to his death, all unwittingly, but alas! too certainly. Maggie’s conscience had already scornfully rejected Gregory’s explanation of the event, as Dr. Mackenzie’s mind would inevitably spurn Mr. Brown’s version later on. To both the doctor and Maggie, Peter Wong must always be a human creature cut off from the light of sun through their fault.

“Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God,” groaned Dr. Mackenzie, as he sank down on a chair near the table, and covered his face with his hands.

“Don’t, don’t,” said Maggie impulsively, rising and going towards him. His grief was even greater than hers.

“So that’s how you take advantage of my absence, Dr. Mackenzie! To make love in this outrageous fashion to my wife!”

Gregory was behind them. Dr. Mackenzie hastily dropped the little hand he had taken and was holding, almost unconsciously, and turned a face crimson with conflicting emotions on the intruder.

"Do you call this a Christian deed, a fit attitude for a missionary?" Gregory went on tauntingly. "What would your converts say to this?"

"Gregory, Gregory!" put in Maggie imploringly. But she had no need to defend the doctor. He could very well defend himself.

"Mr. King," he said, rising and facing him, or rather, towering over him, "You, of all men in the world, ought to have known better than to say what you have just said. But you have taught me now, what I should have known long ago, what manner of man you are."

Here he paused for a moment, and then went on, in an altered tone;—

"Guard well the treasure you have got. I shall not interfere with you. My work here is finished. I go to seek a new sphere far, far away. You have seen me for the last time."

He did not offer to shake hands with Gregory, but turned to Maggie, who was holding on to the table as though she feared she would fall.

"Good-bye, dear child. If ever you want me, come to me."

\* \* \* \* \*

But it was not till after many many days, till the death of Peter Wong had almost become a shadowy memory to him, that far away in the wilds of Western China, meditating one day at eventide over the mistakes of his life, Neil Mackenzie lifted up his eyes, and saw his heart's desire coming unto him.



---

**SINGAPORE:**  
**KELLY AND WALSH, LIMITED, PRINTERS.**  
**32, Raffles Place,**

---

**1899.**

---



BY THE SAME AUTHOR :

- VOL. I. { No. 1.—*Dobson's Daughter.*  
          { No. 2.—*Of the Noble Army.*
- VOL. II. { No. 3.—*In the Sixties.*  
          { No. 4.—*Playing Providence.*





BY THE SAME AUTHOR :

VOL. I. { No. 1.—*Dobson's Daughter*.  
          { No. 2.—*Of the Noble Army*.

VOL. II. { No. 3.—*In the Sixties*.  
          { No. 4.—*Playing Providence*.









Stanford University Libraries



3 6105 006 986 322

h715

.G52.C5

v.2/3

CECIL H. GREEN LIBRARY  
STANFORD UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES  
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305-6004  
(650) 723-1493

[gncirc@sulmail.stanford.edu](mailto:gncirc@sulmail.stanford.edu)

All books are subject to recall.

DATE DUE

JAN 13 2003

JAN 2 2003

JAN 24 2003

